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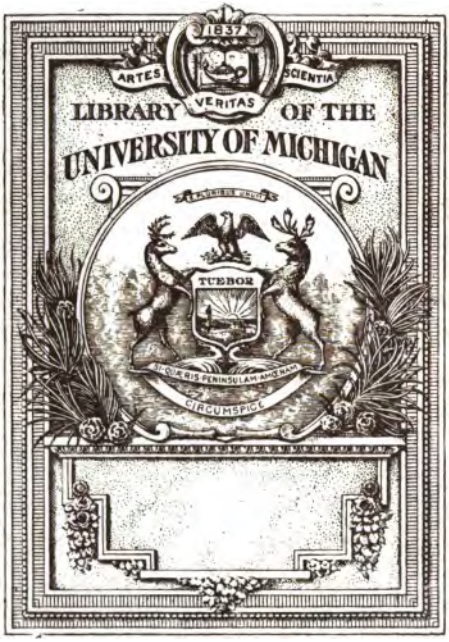

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A STRANGE ELOPEMENT

BY

W. CLARK RUSSELL

AUTHOR OF "A SAILOR'S SWEETHEART," ETC., ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY W. H. OVEREND

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I

MR. GEORGE PELLEW

HAVING perfectly recovered my health after a term of sick-leave that had run into many months, I went on board the *Light of Asia* at Plymouth. In this ship I had taken my passage to Calcutta to rejoin my regiment. I am writing of thirty years ago, when the road to the East lay by way of the Cape of Good Hope, and when a voyage to India signified a residence of four, sometimes of five, months on board ship.

The *Light of Asia* was a large Blackwall liner, as a certain class of vessels which sailed from the Thames used to be called. She rose to a burthen of about fifteen hundred tons, which in those days constituted a big ship. I have the picture of her before me now as she

floated that September day on the silk-smooth surface of Plymouth Sound, blue Peter languidly swaying at the fore, her house flag of brilliant dyes clothing, as with a coat of fire, the head of the royal mast at the main, and a great brand-new crimson ensign drooping from the gaff end, and streaking the water under the stern with a dash of red as though a soldier had fallen overboard and was slowly settling to the bottom. I am no sailor, yet I believe had I commanded that ship I could not preserve a clearer recollection of her. A broad white band broken with black-painted ports ran along her side, and you looked for the tompioned muzzles of guns, so frigate-like did she float. The thick rigging of hemp rose black and massive to the tops and cross-trees, and upon the yards lying square across the masts the sails were stowed white as sifted snow, and they resembled sifted snow moulded to the image of furled canvas by cunning hands. The morning sunshine was on her, and the lambencies of the circular windows along her sides trembled in prisms and stars in the water that brimmed to a hand's breadth above her yellow sheathing.

Several boats were congregated at the foot of her gangway ladder; her forecastle was rich with the scarlet of the tunics of some three or four scores of soldiers. Many people, ladies and gentlemen were in motion upon her poop-deck, some looking at the boats over the side, some taking farewell glances at the land through binocular glasses. The figures of sailors running about could be seen in the open gangway, and the delicate breathing of the morning air was made vocal by the shrill whistling of a boatswain's pipe, though for what purpose *that* music was played I cannot tell. A number of the passengers had come round in the ship from Gravesend, but there were others who, like myself, were joining her at Plymouth, and when I mounted the gangway ladder I found the quarter-deck full of people. The bustle was disordering to the spirits. It is hard enough to take leave of one's native land for one's self; but to witness the distress of departure in others, the dejected countenance, the swimming eyes, the clinging of hand to hand, to hear the broken utterances of farewell, the "God bless you, my darling," the "Write soon

and often," the heart's grief in each syllable taking new and piteous accentuation from the lip quivering as it forms the words—these are things to convert one's own personal emotion into a real burden of wretchedness, and I was glad to scramble as best I could through the crowd, and through the boxes and bundles which littered the deck, into the comparative repose of the saloon, or cuddy as it was then called, in search of a steward who should convey my bags below and show me where my bedroom was.

All my baggage had been put aboard in the London Docks, and so when I met with a steward, there was no more for him to convey to my berth than a small portmanteau and one or two bundles. He was one of the understewards, a young flat-faced man in a camlet jacket and a strawberry mark on his cheek. I gave him my name,—Captain Swift,—and he at once seemed to know where my berth was.

"Is the gentleman who is to share my cabin on board?" said I.

"He is, sir."

"Where did he join the vessel?"

"In the Docks."

"Humph!" said I. "He seems to wish to make a longer voyage of it than need be. What sort of gentleman is he—old or young? And his calling, do you know?"

"He's young, sir. Can't tell you his calling, I'm sure. A gent, I take it; simply a gent, sir. Certainly he's no sailor, for he's kept his bed ever since we hauled out, and there he's still a-lying."

I was vexed to hear this, for the association of a man chronically sea-sick as a bedroom companion threatened a truly awful condition of the voyage if I should be unable to exchange my berth.

I had thus questioned the under-steward whilst we stood at the head of the staircase which conducted to the quarters I was to occupy; and let me here explain the structure of the after-part of this ship, for it is the stage on which was enacted the singular drama it is my business to communicate, and it is desirable for due appreciation of the performance that the scenery should be very clearly submitted. The saloon, then, of this ship con-

sisted of a long interior, the deck or roof of which was called the poop. A row of cabins went down on either hand of it, and in the centre was a long table with a cross table at the after-end, the two forming the shape of the letter T, and there were fixed benches at the sides of the table for the people to sit upon at their meals. The huge trunk of the mizzen-mast pierced the deck and might have passed for a colossal column designed wholly for the support of the roof of this saloon. Everything was in good taste, with something of pomp in the decorations. There were many mirrors; the carpets were rich; the lamps were numerous and of brilliant metal; there was a handsome piano, and, fore and aft, the place was abundantly sweetened and illuminated by the perishing beauties of flowers. Close against the front of the saloon, where the windows of it overlooked the main-deck, was a large square hatchway, down which fell a flight of broad steps that conducted to a row of cabins similar to those above them. My berth was there—my half-berth as I may call it, and thither I now followed the under-steward, anx-

ious to establish myself speedily that I might get on deck again and see what sort of people I was to have as fellow-passengers.

The cabin I was shown into was somewhat dark. This was partly due to my entering it fresh from the bright light above. A degree of gloom, however, absent in the other cabins, was occasioned by the overhanging ledge of the mizzen-channels, a wide platform projecting from the ship's side for spreading the rigging of the mast. The cabin porthole looked directly out from under this channel, which served to shade it from the light as the peak of a cap protects the eyes. There was, nevertheless, plenty of light to see by, and I found myself in a small compartment furnished in the usual seagoing fashion with a couple of bunks or bedsteads, one on top of the other, the top one close under the porthole, a contrivance of basin, glass, and the like in a corner for purposes of toilet, two small fixed chests of drawers, and a small heap of luggage marked with the letters G. P. I noticed a scent of tobacco, as though a pipe or cigar had been recently extinguished.

In the lower bunk lay a young fellow completely dressed in a suit of tweed, with varnished boots and red silk socks. His hands were folded upon his waistcoat, and there was a flash of gems upon them as he breathed. I could not very clearly distinguish his face in the gloom of the hole in which he reposed, but what little I saw instantly struck me as remarkable. It was a revelation of manly beauty—a slow stealing out, from the dimness, of physical lineaments of considerable grace and charm. To say this is perhaps to say all that I have it in my power to communicate, for any effort of description would impair in the reader the impression which I desire to reflect from my own sense and memory of this young man's beauty. This much, however, I may say, that he differed from the fashion that was at that period current in the wearing of his hair. The whisker was then almost universally worn; but the cheek and chin of this young man were as smooth as a woman's, whilst his dark auburn moustache was not so heavy but that it allowed his very perfectly formed mouth to be seen. Though recumbent, his stature was to be known

by the measurement of his bunk—that was six feet six inches—from whose bottom board his feet rested at a distance of about half a foot.

I stood looking at him for a little breathing while, scarce conscious of the incivility of such a stare in the singular fascination I found in his appearance. He eyed me in return with a clear, keen gaze that gave the lie direct to the drowsy droop of his eyelids. Sea-sick he certainly was not; nor did he discover the least appearance of indisposition of any sort; and I was astonished to find him lying in the comparative gloom of this cabin instead of being on deck where the weak sweet breath of the morning air, charged with the autumnal aromas of the land, was to be tasted, and whence a noble spectacle of English scenery was to be viewed: the sloping greenery of Mount Edgcumbe, the little emerald-like gem of Drake's Island, the pleasant slope of the Hoe, and the fifty details of marine beauty betwixt the ship and the shore in the shape of the line-of-battle ship straining at her anchor with her three tiers of batteries overhanging the smooth waters, the dark-winged smack languidly seeking an offing,

a Symondite brig-of-war delicate as a carving of tinted ivory.

The steward put my traps into my bunk and was about to quit the cabin.

"When do we sail?" exclaimed the young fellow in a soft and quiet voice.

"At noon, sir."

The young man produced a large magnificent gold watch. "How many passengers have come on board since we dropped anchor here?" said he.

"I cannot tell, sir," answered the steward in a tone of mingled respect and astonishment. "I will inquire, sir."

"Do so, and get me a list of the passengers if you can," exclaimed the young fellow, speaking with some increase of energy, and in anything but a sea-sick voice.

"Very good, sir." Again the steward was making as if to go, when he suddenly paused and said, "Shall you lunch in the saloon, sir?"

"No," replied the young fellow with a sudden drop in the note of his voice, the artificiality of which was instantly distinguishable by my ear, "I am not well, and here I shall con-

tinue. Let me have my meals as hitherto—the leg of a chicken, a pint bottle of champagne—the merest trifle will serve my turn until I feel better. If I give trouble I hope there is nothing unusual in it. People cannot help feeling squeamish at sea."

"No trouble, sir," answered the man. He paused, and, finding the young fellow silent, went out.

"I am to share your berth," said I, struck by his talk to the steward as though my presence were unheeded by him; "I hope I shall not inconvenience you?"

"No. It cannot be helped. I wished to have a cabin to myself, but the ship is full. May I inquire your name?"

"Swift—Captain Swift." I added the name of my regiment, and asked if he was in the Army.

"No." There was an energy in his *no's* that to the ear corresponded to the beat of a strong pulse to the finger. "My name is Pellew—Mr. George Pellew."

As he spoke I glanced at the initials upon a portmanteau of his that lay close by. Was it

because of his way of pronouncing the words George Pellew? Was it because of some instinctive incommunicable reason, unintelligible to myself perhaps, that I could not find it in me to fit the name to the man who pronounced it? This much I recollect: I was as certain at that moment that George Pellew was *not* his name as that mine *was* Graham Swift. His large eye was resting full, keenly and intelligently upon me as I turned afresh to view him; but the lids drooped in a moment, and he suddenly averted his face whilst he pocketed the watch which he had continued to hold and toy with.

I was in no temper to express sympathy with an indisposition which seemed to me entirely feigned; and however much my curiosity was to be presently tickled, just now I was too full of thoughts of the leave-taking I was fresh from—of the beloved mother I had said good-bye to, perhaps for ever—of the old country which it might be my destiny never again to behold—for my mind to feel actively interested in this extraordinarily handsome and mysterious cabin companion of mine. I briefly inquired if I could be of any use to him; there

were boats alongside—had he letters to send, any communication to make with the shore? He thanked me with a graceful smile which swiftly faded as to a sudden emotion of despondency, and there being nothing to detain me in the cabin, I slightly bowed to him and quitted the berth.

I escaped the crowd on the main deck by arriving on the poop by the steps conducting through the companion-way. As I passed through the saloon I observed a busy coming and going of people, little knots in earnest conversation, doors suddenly opening and closing, with figures of ladies and gentlemen at the table eagerly scratching some final missive for the shore. There was a good number of persons assembled on the poop, a large proportion of them friends of the passengers, and it was impossible to tell who was and who was not going out in the ship. It was about eleven o'clock; we were to sail, if the under-steward was to be believed, at noon. The captain however was not apparently on board, and at present there were no signs of the ship getting under way. I lighted a cigar and planted my-

self right aft, close against the deserted wheel, and with folded arms contemplated the picture of the fabric that was to be my home for the next four or five months.

I confess I had never felt lonelier. It was not wholly the reactionary emotion of leave-taking and the mere sense of *being* alone; there was in addition that deep and burdensome feeling of solitude that visits a man who is solitary in a crowd. Whilst I stood in a melancholy mood blowing a cloud of tobacco-smoke, and watching with dull interest the various gestures and facial expressions of the knots of people and surveying with languid admiration the combined effect of this picture of almond-white decks, of burnished glass skylights, of sparkling brass-work, of the soft and various hues of women's apparel, of the scarlet of the soldiers' uniforms, blending with the striped shirts or rough blue jackets of the seamen, the whole framed by the tall line of the bulwarks from which ascended the heavy black mass of the shrouds and gear, carrying the eye upwards to the starry altitudes of the trucks whose white buttons gleamed against the misty blue as

though they were formed of frosted silver; whilst, I say, my eyes and thoughts were thus despondently busy, there arose through the companion-hatch, the yawn of which immediately confronted me as I stood abaft the wheel, the figure of a stout, fiercely-whiskered military man, who on putting his foot upon the deck turned to extend his hand to a young lady who was immediately following him.

I seemed to know the gentleman by sight: I had probably met him at a club; some fleeting view of him perhaps as he sat at table or passed through a room had left upon my mind the impression of his handsome, striking, but haughty, fierce, and forbidding face. He was above six feet in height, erect as a ramrod, with that sort of figure which when witnessed in men of my calling instinctively makes one think of the thunder of a charger's gallop, of the gleam of a brandished sabre, and of some motionless confronting ranks of men, massed into a hedge of gleaming blue steel. His whiskers were white, and stood out formidably from either cheek; his large moustache lay like a roll of cotton wool under his nostrils, and either

side of it went with an angry curl that reached very nearly to the ear. There was a fixed air of frowning in his eyes, which were of the deadness of unpolished jet, suggesting black blood not very many generations back. The dark hue of his cheek was made darker yet by the contrast of his white hair.

It was easy to guess that the young lady whom he handed through the companion-way was his daughter. The subtlety of the resemblance eludes description, yet I at once said to myself, she is his child. Of the several types of female beauty I have beheld in my time and can recall there is none that I can remember to compare this girl's with. It was not the amazingly delicate complexion of her skin, nor the dull bronze of her hair, nor the liquid softness and fire of her large, dark-brown eyes; there was nothing in lip, nose, or ear, in form of face or grace of brow, that created for her that individuality of charm and separate wonder of beauty which my sight, on going to her, instantly witnessed. What was it then? The pen of a Hawthorne or of a De Quincey alone could expound the mystery. That it was

character I do not doubt; an active blending of informing qualities of mind which wrought in her face, as by some delicate miracle of the painter's art the likeness of a woman whose beauty is wholly material might be infinitely raised by the involvement of a sweet impassioned character with its physical loveliness and made a marvellous thing of.

Never could one figure the melancholy of resignation expressed in the same degree as one found it in this girl's countenance. I met her glance, and the idea suggested to me by it was that she was always seeing something beyond the object at which she directed her eyes. Her father, for her father it was, addressed her, as he stood a moment sending a sweeping look over the people, then gave her his arm, and together they went forward, where he was immediately accosted, and was presently towering amid a little group that gathered round him.

A sailorly-looking man with a sunburnt face, a naval peak to his cap, and dressed in a suit of serge came with a deep sea lurch to the binnacle, behind which I was sitting on a grating that formed a little deck abaft the wheel. I

guessed him to be one of the mates of the ship and carelessly asked him at what hour we sailed.

"Very shortly, sir," he answered. "I'm expecting the captain aboard every minute, and the moment he arrives we shall get our anchor."

"You have a great number of passengers?"

"Yes, sir, we are a full ship."

"Pray," said I, "can you tell me the name of that tall gentleman yonder with the white whiskers—that man who stands there with the charming young lady on his arm?"

"Major-General Sir Charles Primrose, K.C.B., and as much more of the alphabet going to his name as would steady a big kite if they were made a tail of," he responded with a laugh in the light-blue eye he turned upon me.

The name was of course perfectly familiar to me, and I could now recollect having read or heard that Sir Charles was about to proceed to India to take command of a district the name of which has escaped my memory. I asked the mate if the young lady who leaned upon the General's arm was his daughter, and he an-

swered, yes: she was Miss Primrose, as it stood in the passengers' list.

"Is Lady Primrose on board?" I said.

He could not tell me; he believed not; he fancied that the general was a widower.

This mate, who turned out to be the chief officer of the ship, Mr. John Freeman by name, had very little information to communicate about the passengers. Yet we contrived to find topics enough for conversation to keep us leaning over the side some ten minutes or quarter of an hour, during which I spoke of my somewhat mysterious cabin-fellow, Mr. George Pellew; but he knew nothing of him; he did not even seem conscious that such a gentleman was aboard; until suddenly starting and fetching a telescope from the skylight and levelling it he exclaimed that the captain was coming and hurried away.

The name of the master of the ship was Stagg—Captain Stagg—a man whose low stature and bow legs caused him to present a very insignificant figure, spite of the careful manner in which he wrapped himself up in a cloth frock coat decorated with brass buttons, so that

he needed but a tall hat to resemble a harbour master rather than a blue-water mariner; his face however proclaimed his calling; his countenance was scored and furrowed with long years of hard-weather life, and one seemed to trace the word "ocean" scrawled all over it, as upon the trunk of a tree or the back of an old seat one witnesses a name rudely chiselled by some wanton knife, repeated over and over again. His head was singularly orbicular in shape, his eyes were large and protruding, of a dull and watery blue, his nose was twisted to the left as from a blow, whilst his mouth had a decided curl to the right as from perversity: and between them these perfidious features communicated to his countenance an expression of blunt and mirthful good-nature which was certainly foreign to the man's character.

He arrived on the poop, pulling off his cap with many grotesque contortions to the ladies and gentlemen assembled, and a few minutes afterwards a bell on the quarter-deck used for the sea-chimes of the hours was violently and alarmingly rung to the accompaniment of the shouts of mates and midshipmen dispersed

about the decks ordering those who were not sailing to India to immediately quit the ship. From the sternmost extremity of the vessel I watched the process of getting under way with interest. First of all the windlass was manned; a voice of storm began a song, the burden of which was regularly taken up by thirty or forty hurricane throats, for in those days ships went liberally manned. Strange was the effect of this wild sea chorus as one listened to it whilst watching those who were leaving and those who were remaining, bidding one another farewell. The poop was quickly thinned; a few passengers stood at the rail waving handkerchiefs and kissing hands to their friends as they entered the boats alongside; the General with his daughter upon his arm stood at the break of the poop, gazing down upon a scene of emotion and distress upon the quarter-deck with a face of wood. The little captain, with his pumpkin-shaped head and protruding eyes, as dim as jelly-fish, sidled athwart the deck on his rounded shanks with the rhythmic action of the pendulum, now gazing aloft, now sending a look

forward at the forecastle, where stood the mate gazing at the cable as it came in link by link, now directing his glance around the scene of bay and out to sea past the breakwater. A little wind was blowing; it blew direct from Plymouth town, and you heard the sounds of the life ashore in it, the noise of bells and the dim, thread-like hum of distant locomotion. There was weight enough in the air to tremble the water under the sun into a giant surface of blinding stars and diamonds, and, September as the month was, the land—the beautiful land of this most noble bay—seemed to gather to itself a dye of tropic softness and richness from the sudden brushing of the water into shuddering splendour.

Presently a number of figures raced aloft, orders were sharply given and as sharply re-echoed; all three topsails were let fall at once, and the white cloths flashed to the lower yard-arms as the clews were swiftly sheeted home; the hollow clanking of the windlass pawls ceased as the great yards mounted shaping the lustrous canvas into symmetric spaces and clothing the lofty fabric with the grace of white and

spacious wings. A little later and the long jib-booms of the *Light of Asia* were pointing seawards, with the windlass still clanking, the hoarse voices of men still chorusing, fold after fold of sail falling and then rising, passengers along the line of the bulwarks passionately gesticulating good-byes, and a crowd of boats with motioning people standing erect in them slowly settling away astern.

II

GENERAL AND MISS PRIMROSE

I HAD a good opportunity on this first day of sailing of observing the numerous company who were proceeding to India. With the exception of Mr. George Pellew, I believe that all the passengers assembled at the luncheon table at one o'clock on this, *my* first day at all events of the voyage, at which hour the ship was well clear of the Sound, standing for the central Channel navigation under full breasts of canvas from truck to waterway; her decks an extraordinarily busy scene of sailors coiling away the rigging and clearing up, and of soldiers passing in and out of the galley with smoking kids and steaming puddings for the messes of the three or four score men who formed the ship's cargo of red-coats.

The water was wonderfully smooth, otherwise the company might not have been numerous. I observed the glittering swing-trays, and their scarcely perceptible oscillation indicated a movement in the ship that could be trying only to the imagination. Surely Mr. George Pellew, who smoked tobacco in his cabin and talked of chicken and champagne—something light in short, when trifles lighter than air are as heavy as thunderbolts to the really capsized stomach—could not be so seriously inconvenienced by this soft cradling and rhythmic sliding of the structure, in whose movements you felt the whole life coming into her out of her milky pinions, as to be obliged to keep his cabin! I ran my eye over the company. It was an *omnium gatherum*—as typical a mixture of human beings as was ever wafted from the British coast to remote parts. Ten or twelve military men; a parson; a brigade surgeon; a naval lieutenant; a beef-faced merchant captain named Whale, the representative of a firm of ship-owners, sailing to India to inquire into some matter of collision. Needless to say it took me a few days to find

out these people's vocations. There were some Civil Service young gentlemen; and we were largely leavened by ladies, from Mrs. Colonel Mowbray, an immensely stout woman, whose high Roman nose and projecting under lip made one think of a wall drinking fountain—spout and cup: down—though I know not why *down* —to a delicate young girl named Miss Vavasour, whose brilliant eyes and wax-like fingers too surely indicated that her embarkation in pursuit of health was all too late.

My gaze however was chiefly attracted by Miss Primrose. The General sat on the right of the captain at the athwartship table at the after-end of the saloon, and his daughter's seat was next him. Sir Charles darted searching looks everywhere, pausing sometimes with an air of haughty and contemptuous inspection; but his daughter kept her eyes downwards bent. She seldom raised them I observed even when replying to words addressed to her by one or two ladies who sat near. She lunched in her hat, which, being somewhat large and richly plumed, overshadowed her face, sitting as she did for the most part with her head

bowed; yet enough was visible of her countenance to render its expression of melancholy memorable to me even though my sight had gone to her then for the first and last time. Nor was it melancholy only: there was something of fear in it too, and the combined effect seemed to my mind to suggest a violent heart-wrench, the brutality of which had coloured anguish with the highest form of tragic amazement.

At this first lunch aboard the *Light of Asia* we were all very constrained, truly British in our cautious regard and wary approaches. Here and there you would hear a voice talking somewhat loftily and drawlingly, and occasionally a "Yaas" and a "Good Ged" would meet the ear, and there was a frequent glitter of wine-glasses raised to moustachioed lips; and a species of emotion termed by newspaper reporters "sensation" would be noticeable amongst the ladies when reference was made for instance to the Bay of Biscay and to the weather off Agulhas. I eyed General Primrose with some respect, for he was a man who had risen by merit to distinction in his profession,

and he had a high character for courage and fortitude and adroitness in passages of difficulty, though I had also heard of him as an unpleasantly severe disciplinarian and a person whose popularity was wholly to be found amongst those who had never been in any sort of way associated with him. What was his motive, I remember speculating, for withdrawing his melancholy daughter from the green lands and pleasant climate of England, to hold her within sight under the bloom-destroying sun of India? He did not look to be a gentleman who stood in need of the ministrations of a daughter. A valet, a man-servant, always standing at attention, a passive object to be easily sworn at, a target for a half-wellington boot, something too large to be missed by even an awkwardly flung missile: this methought, as I gazed at his stern, haughty, and forbidding face, with its eyes which seemed to shower impassioned expletives at every glance, was the species of attendant *he* would require—*he* with his savagely curled white moustache and sullen dye of cheek which promptly sent the mind to years of inflaming dishes and to a liver dis-

organized by protracted periods of injudicious hospitality. Was he taking out this girl to India to get her married? Surely her gift of most uncommon beauty must render such a project as *that* the easiest of all achievable things in England, providing of course she held no opinions of her own on the subject. And these speculations, all swiftly entered upon and dismissed, as I sat on this first day at sea at that table, conducted me to another fancy: was her undissembled expression of melancholy due to love? Had she made some grave maidenly blunder—from her father's point of view I mean? And was this voyage to India, and was her residence in that country, to be the General's corrective for an untimely or an ill-placed sentiment?

But whilst I thus sat thinking, exchanging now and again somewhat abstractedly a sentence with the surgeon of the ship, whose place at table was next me, the bulkheads on either hand slightly creaked and the ship leaned to a sudden increase of weight in the wind, and to the first of a long light heave of swell rolling to the quarter of the vessel out of the south-east.

In fact I supposed we had now opened the Channel past Bolt Head, and the respiration of the wide breast of water beyond was to be felt. There was some staring one at another, and a general pause in the conversation; but the ship continued to roll, lightly indeed, yet in a manner to cause one to look at one's wine-glass to see what was to become of it. Then one lady stood up, then another; Mrs. Colonel Mowbray sailed balloon-like to her cabin, and in a few moments everybody was in motion hastening on deck or withdrawing to his berth.

Though by no means an old sailor—in those days my age was eight-and-twenty, and I had rounded the Cape of Good Hope twice in my passages to and from India—sea-sickness never troubled me. My cigar-case was empty, and I went to my cabin to fill it from my portmanteau. I use the words cabin and berth indifferently; but strictly the term *berth* applies to a sleeping-place on board ship, whilst *cabin* signifies the living-room. As I made my way to my berth I felt very sensibly the inconvenience of sharing it with another; or perhaps I should say with such another as Mr. Pellew threatened

to be—a man who promised to be incessantly present whenever I made my visits, and who must therefore rob my half of the sea-bedroom of all charm of privacy. I opened the door and found him sitting erect in his bunk, with his legs over the edge, smoking a Manila cheroot. A tray containing the remains of his luncheon and an empty bottle of champagne stood on the deck. His posture now fully disclosed him; the sunshine lay strong upon the sea on the port hand of the vessel on which side our cabin was situated, and the sheen flowing off the rich and trembling brilliancy of the water gushed to the large open porthole, and rendered the interior thrice as light as I had previously found it.

I stood for a few moments staring with real wonder and admiration at the surprising beauty of the young fellow's face—but a beauty as masculine as any woman could wish to find in the graces of a man—every feature virile in its very essence. He smiled and, holding up his cigar, exclaimed, "I am an inveterate smoker, and hope you will not object to the smell of tobacco-smoke in this cabin?"

"Not at all. I too am a hard smoker." I opened my portmanteau and produced a box of cigars. "But I should have thought that smoking would not suit your complaint."

"My nausea?" he exclaimed, eying me gravely and keenly. "Oh, yes. Tobacco is good for sea-sickness. It has certain tonical properties. It is also a sort of narcotic, they say. Whatever is good for the nerves is good for nausea." He continued to coolly puff at his weed, meanwhile observing me with a narrowness wholly wanting in offence, though it made me very sensible of its curious quality of penetration.

"Pray," said I carelessly, but talking with intention, "why do you not go on deck and breathe the fresh air? Surely for nausea there is a virtue in fresh air which must be wanting even in tobacco."

"I am very well here," he answered. "Did you lunch in the saloon?"

"I did."

"Many present?"

"All, I should say, saving yourself."

"A large number of military men, no doubt?"

"Yes, we muster fairly well."

"MY NAUSEA?" HE EXCLAIMED. "OH, YES, TOBACCO IS GOOD FOR SEA-SICKNESS."

"In fact," said he, "this is almost a troop-ship. The fellow who waits upon me here, talks of there being a General on board."

"So there is," said I, "Major-General Sir Charles Primrose—a big gun in his way—a whole breast of medals no doubt, and with record enough to furnish him with a page or two in books which tell you who people with titles are."

"Do you know him?" he asked languidly.

"No, but I shall be presently making his acquaintance, perhaps."

"I dare say he is a very disagreeable person. An objectionable old East Indian officer surely tops the list of people one ought to dislike. Such airs! such prejudices! such despotism, resulting from the habit of commanding not only black troops, but black servants. And then," continued he, preserving his languid voice, "the objectionable old East Indian officer has a trick of shouting when he converses. He will bawl *good-morning* to you as though he were ordering a regiment of Sepoys to charge. I believe I shall remain very much out of sight. It is miserable to be locked up with unpleasant

people," he added, talking with an affectation of "nerves" and with a sleepy droop of his lids which only served to sharpen the clear intelligent gaze of his handsome eyes.

"But you will not surely wholly live in this cabin?"

"No. I will of course take the air from time to time, but I shall probably continue to eat here. There is no shipboard law I presume to oblige a passenger to take his meals at the cabin table? Many ladies on board?" continued he, speaking with a slight drawl.

"A baker's dozen, I should say—perhaps more."

"I figure," said he—"a Lady Primrose, a woman rendered as objectionable as her husband by the contaminating airs and graces of Indian society."

"There is no Lady Primrose: at least there is no Lady Primrose in this ship. There is a Miss Primrose, a beautiful and interesting girl. But why do you speak of the General as objectionable? I have not called him so, and you I may take it have not yet met him."

He slightly yawned, and answered whilst he

relighted his cigar: "Something in your reference to him may have suggested the old gentleman as objectionable. I really do not know, Captain Swift, and I may honestly add that I really do not care."

"Well," said I, moving towards the door, "I must hope to be able to coax you on deck later on."

He smiled, and rose out of his bunk to take a book from the top of the little chest of drawers which he had appropriated. He was even taller than I had supposed him to be, a magnificent figure of a man, and as he stood for a moment there was the grace of a reposing dancer in his posture. "Well now," thought I as I walked out, "who the dickens is this noble creature I should like to know? and what is his motive in going to India? and what can be his object in imprisoning himself in a darksome cabin? And he is to be *my* berth-fellow too! I shall find out something about him by and by, no doubt. Is he a criminal flying from his country? A forger? a homicide? A mystery there certainly is. He is no more sea-sick than I am; he is no more averse to the society

of old East India officers than another. What is it then?" And this question, uttered to myself, landed me on the poop.

The scene into which I rose extinguished in me all thoughts of Mr. Pellew. The after-part of the ship was comparatively deserted, many of the passengers being probably too incommoded by the movements of the vessel to show themselves, whilst others were busy in their berths with the bestowal of the clothes and conveniences they had brought with them. The breeze had considerably freshened, and the countenance of the windward sky had undergone one of those swift changes which always impress me as a sort of miracle. When I had gone below to lunch, the heavens were high and pure, with but a film of cloud here and there, and the sun in the south and west sparkled in the September atmosphere with a silver mistiness that by a discerning eye might have been deemed prophetic. And now that same face of heaven was sullen with ridged cloud, a surface of corrugated vapour that was already streaming past our mast-heads and away over the lee-bow, with the sun now and again flashing a

single beam through a crevice and smiting some frothing head of sea under it into a dazzle of snow. The ship was swarming along magnificently, some of her lighter sails on high blowing out like bladders in the grip of their gear, with the figures of reefers aft, and seamen forward trotting up the wide spread of massive black shrouds to furl the canvas; her round bow and enormously thick cutwater stormed through the hurl of the surge, and often to her curtseyings the foam was swept ahead of her to the distance of her flying-jibboom end when it would come rushing past in a giddy boiling that made the eye which watched it spin again.

This was, indeed, being at sea! We had sunk the land—No! hard away down upon the quarter in the windy haze you saw the phantasmal loom of the English coast, but so ghost-like was it that it eluded the gaze you directed that way; it revealed itself fitfully and was gone when you looked. Yet it was England, the last glimpse maybe we were to obtain of the old home; and my spirits sank as I strained my eyes into the horizon.

I peered through the glass of the skylight

and saw Miss Primrose seated at the table almost directly beneath. An open book lay before her, but it was easy to guess by her slightly averted face that her eyes were not fastened upon the page. She had removed her hat, and I could now see that she added to her other extraordinary charms an amazing profusion, a wonderful luxuriance of dark gold hair—to call it so, though it would puzzle a greater artist in words than I to communicate the exquisite hue of this girl's tresses. She sat motionless as though in a profound reverie, making nothing of the gathering uneasiness of the ship's movements and entirely heedless of those who passed her. Indeed in the brief space during which I watched, a lady paused and addressed her, then, finding herself unanswered, moved on with a smile.

The mate standing at the rail which protected the overhanging ledge of the poop-deck was sending orders in a bull-like note aloft and forward, and the ship was full of hurry. Indeed the weather was hardening into what promised to be half a gale of wind, and I stood watching with interest the complicated business of

shortening sail. Many of the poor Tommies were already hopelessly sea-sick, leaning over

"SHE SAT MOTIONLESS AS THOUGH IN A PROFOUND REVERIE."

the bulwark rail, and a few of them lay like logs in the lee scuppers, rolling a little way to the left and then a little way to the right with

the heave of the deck. Some who were more seasoned dragged with the sailors at the ropes, and their uniforms combining with the varied apparel of the Jacks made so commonplace a shipboard matter as that of manning the topsail halliards quite a picturesque affair. But happily the wind blew from a quarter to quickly thunder us out of the Channel, and by five o'clock the ship with a reef in each topsail was thrashing at some ten or eleven miles in the hour through the swelling waters, flinging the spray aft as far as the gangway with a frequent large soft cloud of spume blowing like a burst of steam off her bow, a couple of men at the wheel, a long race of boiling wake astern of her, and a rigging vocal with orchestral notes that rose at times into triumphal bursts amid which the fanciful ear might catch the clear bugling of some wild ocean melody.

III

MY MYSTERIOUS CABIN-FELLOW

From this hour I date a long term of stormy weather. In fact for several days the decks were unvisitable; the rain swept in sheets past the masts: the scuppers sobbed to the incessant downpour, and the wet gale blew with an edge of ice in it. Most of the passengers kept their cabins. Sir Charles was amongst those who were prostrated, and of his daughter I saw nothing. Often not more than six or eight of us assembled at meal-times. Mr. Pellew remained below with the others who were sea-sick; yet he certainly did not suffer. He ate well, was constantly smoking, emptied his bottle of champagne with relish, and was sufficiently easy to be able to sprawl upon his back in his bunk and to read novels, of which he had

a heap that stood in a corner of the berth. He would ask me in a voice of indifference what was going forward on deck, but no more was exchanged between us than common civility exacted.

I liked the confinement of my berth so little that after I quitted it of a morning my visits to it were very few and far between; and commonly, when I turned in of a night, my friend under me—for, as you know, I occupied the top bunk—was either asleep or hinting by keeping his eyes closed that he did not wish to converse. While such weather as we were now having continued it was not very likely that inquiries would be made about my secret and mysterious cabin-passenger; his representations of sea-sickness which would filter through the steward who waited upon him to the ears of the captain, mates, and passengers were entirely reasonable and credible. But how would it be later on, when the Madeira parallels, say, gave us bright skies and when everybody must be supposed cured of his nausea? Yet after all what more could follow than general astonishment at so extraordinary a whim—con-

jectures which would presently exhaust themselves, and a vast amount of throbbing curiosity amongst the women, particularly if they should gather that he was the extraordinarily handsome man and noble and commanding figure I found him? What could the captain do? Mr. Pellew had paid for his share of his berth and had a right to live in it, and though to be sure the commander with some idea of rooting the young fellow out of his cell might insist that the privileges of a bedroom did not comprise those of a parlour, it was not to be imagined that he would trouble himself over the behaviour of a man whom he and his officers would straightway set down as half-witted, or in the highest degree eccentric.

I have said that during these days of storm my cabin-fellow and I found little to say to each other outside a few civil commonplaces. At the same time I could not help noticing that he watched me with the air of a man bent upon solving a problem of human character by the interpretation of aspect without reference to speech. His gaze was keen and vivid; I had never encountered looks more penetrating.

Possibly I may have imagined his silent scrutiny a shrewder inquest than it really was, because of my powerlessness to fathom his motive for giving himself this trouble with a perfect stranger. I cannot feign that there was any charm in my face to merit a degree of attention that was sometimes almost impassioned despite its furtiveness. My character was commonplace; I was an off-hand, careless young soldier, by no means burdened with brains, and certainly to him I must have seemed perfectly colourless in intellect, and entirely insipid.

Sometimes I fancied that he was meditating an avowal, though by this time I had wholly absolved him from the several black crimes my early imagination had charged him with. He had not the look of a man with a dark secret. There was a high-born freedom in his face that was like nature's own resentment of a doubt of his honour, of his character, of his career. If he meant then to take me into his confidence, what had he to impart? Once a dim suspicion crossed my mind—vaguely and most illogically I seemed to connect his perplexing self-immurement with the melancholy and beautiful girl

whom I had not seen since I stood viewing her through the cabin skylight. Why? I cannot tell, unless it was because of his manner of dwelling with a kind of careless disgust upon the name of Sir Charles Primrose. But the light suspicion, or imagination rather, vanished in me as soon as it was formed.

The weather moderated on the morning of the fifth day, and when I went on deck after breakfast I found the sun shining amongst huge and swelling bodies of fleecy vapour, which, as their brows smote the luminary, caught a glory that seemed intenser than that of the orb himself, whilst there would flash from the stately sailing masses many fan-shaped radiations of blinding brilliance; the sea of a deep blue was still running high, and far as the eye could reach the ocean was a rising and falling surface of violet surge and frothing heads. It still blew a fresh breeze, but the wind was almost directly aft, sail had been made, and the ship was going along on a level keel, soaring and sinking with the majesty of an old line-of-battle ship, with a regularity that rendered walking easy.

A number of the passengers arrived; there were soldiers sunning themselves forward, and the decks were hospitable with colour and life.

"HE TUCKED HIS DAUGHTER'S HAND UNDER HIS ARM AND FELL TO PATROLLING THE DECK WITH HER."

Amongst those who came on the poop after breakfast—though the lady had not been present at the table—were Sir Charles and his

daughter. He looked somewhat haggard from confinement and sickness, but his face I thought had an unpleasantly hard expression; there was something frowning and even threatening in his eyes which he darted here and there, returning haughty distant bows to the salutation of the captain and others as he tucked his daughter's hand under his arm and fell to patrolling the deck with her. I could not gather that they conversed. She appeared to look at nothing but the planks on which she trod.

Old Captain Whale, the shipowners' representative whom I have previously mentioned, was leaning with me against the rail when they arrived.

"A stern-looking old gentleman!" said he to me; "I shouldn't like to be one of his soldiers. How many black chaps I wonder has he blown from the mouths of cannons? I know you to be of his profession, sir. You'll excuse my freedom."

"It is the traditional privilege of sailors to dislike soldiers," said I, laughing.

"Well, *there* you're right," he exclaimed with a broad grin. "Not but that a soldier may not

be a very good sort of man too, but where for instance would you find even an Admiral who had covered himself with glory, annihilated a fleet, occasioned what the newspapers would call a new geographical distribution, saved the throne, and lowered the income tax, give himself the airs of that old gentleman yonder? His daughter don't look a very happy woman, does she? His cabin's next to mine, and I heard him rating her this morning."

"Rating her? What did you hear?"

"I wouldn't hear. I didn't choose to hear. The fact is, sir, I had no *right* to hear. But the tone of his voice—why, it was like listening to a wrangling bo'sun through a bulkhead."

"How do you know that he was addressing *her?*"

"Why," said he, "as I entered my cabin she entered his. Tell you what," said he, sinking his voice, "there's a love-yarn in that job. That old gentleman's been and broken his daughter's heart. Look at her face, sir."

He wagged his purple countenance, fetched a sigh which for depth and intensity might have followed a long and thirsty pull at a bowl of

punch, and stepped down onto the quarter-deck.

I lingered awhile covertly watching the General and his daughter, and then went to my cabin for a pipe and a pouch of tobacco. Mr. Pellew was seated in my bunk, with his legs dangling over the edge of it, and, as I entered, was intent upon what I thought to be a coloured picture until a step took me close enough to see that it was a map. He begged my pardon for using my bunk, said that he was unable to see in his own bedstead, and then asked me in an easy off-hand way if I understood navigation.

"No," I responded, "I have no knowledge whatever of it."

"I believe," said he, bending his eyes upon the map, "that the marks which sailors make upon their charts to signify the course their ships have sailed along are called 'prickings.'"

"I cannot tell you."

"Here is a little map that I have been pricking," said he. "Have you any idea of our whereabouts to-day?"

"No," said I, "but I recollect that our lati-

tude yesterday was so and so, and as our course is about west-south-west and our average speed since then will have been so and so, our latitude this morning—or say our latitude at noon to-day should be—" I calculated and then named a figure.

He smiled and said, "You are not so ignorant as you pretend, Captain Swift."

"As knowing as the average schoolboy," said I with a shrug and a laugh, and approaching the bunk to take my pipe from a shelf.

"Then my 'prickings' will be pretty nearly right," he exclaimed, handing me the map, that was a very clean tracing of the two Atlantics from the mouth of the British Channel to a few degrees south of Agulhas.

I glanced at the pencil-marks upon it and exclaimed, "Yes. That will be about the situation of our ship at noon to-day, I should think."

"You have made this voyage before?" said he, taking the map from me and looking at it whilst he spoke.

"Once only," said I.

"What land do we sight, can you tell me?"

"I do not remember that we sighted any

land at all until we came to a halt in Simon's Bay, which, as you may know, is close to Cape Town."

"No land at all! I had no notion an Indian voyage signified so very melancholy a waste of waters. Yet," continued he, keeping his eyes fixed upon the map and speaking with the air of one who talks only for the sake of talking—and this was the first time that I had noticed any such disposition for sociability in him—"the navigation to the Cape should occasionally bring the land tolerably close."

"Quite the contrary," said I. "I cannot tell you where the equator is crossed; but I know that it is cut by these sailing keels deep in the heart of the Atlantic. Then, I believe, a course is made to bring the island of Trinidad off the starboard bow, after which the helm is shifted for the transverse stretch that brings the south-east trade-wind whistling to the edge of the sharply braced-up sails."

"You are at no loss for sea-terms," said he, speaking as though his thoughts were elsewhere whilst his eyes continued to muse upon the map; then abruptly folding and pocketing the

coloured sheet, he exclaimed, "Shipwreck must surely be a desperate business in a voyage of this sort. Figure the vessel foundering somewhere in the neighbourhood of the equator! Saving a little rock marked St. Paul there is no land for hundreds of miles for the boat to make for."

"One's best chance must lie in being picked up," said I.

"Ay," he exclaimed with a nod, "I suppose that is so; perhaps the *only* chance; and a pretty sure one, don't you think? There is no ocean so crowded with shipping as the Atlantic."

"Pretty sure or not," I exclaimed, "I hope we may not come to it. My two pet nightmares of fancy are, fire ashore and an open boat at sea."

He made no answer, and producing a cigar, lighted it.

I was astonished that he should choose to confine himself to this cabin. His motive was absolutely unconjecturable. It was ridiculous in him to feign dislike of the passengers. He had boarded the ship in the docks, and had, as I might take it, never set eyes upon a single

being in the ship saving the man who waited upon him. Such a foregone conclusion of dislike or apprehension as his behaviour suggested was not to be received. I wondered that he was not to be coaxed from his immurement by the little picture of ocean splendour that the porthole framed—a miniature that was warrant enough of the glory of the wide canvas without; for through the thick but clear glass the blue, glittering and foaming heights of brine showed clearly with clouds of prismatic spray swept off them by the rush of the clear gale, whilst to the roll of the ship the noble ocean sky of flying white vapours came and went, putting by its coming and going a deep and a wild vitality into that free, radiant, and windy morning.

I quitted the cabin leisurely, conceiving from a sudden inquiring look he fastened upon me that he had some question to ask, but the expression of his face was swiftly chased away by another, and finding him mute, I left him.

Shortly after twelve that day the wind moderated, the sea subsided, studding-sails were run aloft, and the ship floated in beauty and tran-

quillity through as fair an afternoon as ever waned over the sea; the soft brimming run of the surge to her quarter was as a caressful help to her progress, and her three stately spires swayed with a regularity as rhythmic as though they were keeping time to some solemn music audible only at the mastheads. The poop was filled with passengers; the temperature was delightful; the ladies sat here and there in chairs reading or sewing; some of the younger fellows amongst us hung about them, and the "Yaases," "By Geds," and "By George's" were doubly plentiful under the inspiriting influence of the agreeable weather. Sir Charles and Colonel Mowbray paced the deck together, and so far as I could gather their talk seemed to chiefly concern soldiers' rations.

I missed Miss Primrose till on having occasion to enter the saloon I saw her seated at the extreme end of it on a little sofa near the piano, with an open book on her lap, over which her beautiful face drooped as though she slept. I would have given much for an excuse to address her; but no excuse could have been permissible in the face of her manifest desire to

be alone. Once again the idea that had before occurred to me half formed itself in my mind, spite of its having *then* been a conjecture that had scarcely entered my head before it was dismissed as ridiculous. Was that melancholy and beautiful girl yonder the answer to the conundrum submitted by Mr. Pellew's behaviour? I could only mentally shrug my shoulders, so to speak, in response to this suspicion. What was it all to me? Be the affair what it might it was none of mine. And so little was I prone to concern myself in other people's business that but for the circumstance of my being Mr. Pellew's cabin associate, I should never have wasted an instant's thought in speculating about him.

A fine night followed the lovely afternoon that had shone over us; a night of cloudless sky rich with trembling stars more thickly strewn than ever I had beheld, and many of them shining in greens and reds, and of an icy whiteness of light that made one think of a splintered diamond, each fragment preserving the dye its facet had sparkled with before the gem was shattered. There was a young moon

in the west, but without power. The sea flowed in dark and foamless lines, and the light breeze had just enough of weight to hold every sail motionless.

I sat somewhat late at the dinner-table that evening talking with a young officer with whose family I was slightly acquainted, though it was enough that I should have met them to establish a sort of bond between the young fellow and myself all that way distant from home. It was about half-past seven when I stepped out of the saloon into a recess formed by the cabin-front and the bulkhead of a projecting cabin on either side, and lighted a cigar, for we made a kind of smoking-room of this recess, and here a few of us would muster after meals, pipe or cigar in mouth, and chat away an hour or so. The time was what is termed at sea the second dog-watch, when if the weather be fine and the ship demands little or no attention, the crew are at liberty to amuse themselves. They were doing so now; out of the gloom that shrouded the forecastle came the strains of a concertina accompanying the manly notes of a seaman singing. The song

was "Tom Bowling," and the sailor's clear and powerful voice fell back again upon the deck in a soft echo out of the stirless concavities of the sails. Here and there stood or lounged a group of the dusky figures of soldiers talking in subdued accents, with an occasional flash of a lucifer match lighting up some whiskered face for a minute as it sucked at a pipe, and glancing a faint illumination upon the adjacent fellows, so that it was like peering into a camera-obscura.

Colonel Mowbray joined us, a gentleman whose propensity to argue speedily rendered him a bore, and I quitted the little group to stroll forward, with a notion of obtaining a better hearing of the music, and of overhearing the conversation and jokes of the Jacks. As I advanced, stepping along the deck on the lee side, I noticed a couple of figures standing against the galley or ship's kitchen, where their forms were so mingled with the deeper shade of darkness cast by the deck erection as to be indistinguishable at a little distance. I supposed them to be a couple of soldiers—indeed I scarcely glanced at them—and was pressing

yet a little nearer to the forecastle front when I heard my name uttered. This caused me to stop and look, and now being very close to the two men, I made out that one of them, standing over six feet high, was swathed in a cloak of true melodramatic build, the collar of which was upturned, whilst a large black wide-awake drawn low over his forehead disclosed the merest glimmer of his face. The man at his side was a seaman, who, on my pausing, passed round to the other side of the deck by way of the long-boat and disappeared.

This tall, becloaked, obscure figure could be nobody else than my cabin-fellow, Mr. George Pellew.

"I am glad to see you on deck," said I, "your long confinement must certainly end in punishing you."

"Why, no," he exclaimed, speaking in a somewhat muffled voice, as though lifting his lips above the edge of a shawl about his neck to articulate; "I have merely to open the port to get all the air I require. How finely that fellow sings! I know no melody that harmonizes so perfectly with the thoughts which come to

one out of old ocean—when one is upon it—as 'Tom Bowling.' There is something in the tune that makes a man feel he ought to be a sailor."

He paused, and I waited, not doubting he would make some apologetic reference to his strange theatrical garb. But nothing of the sort left his lips. He proceeded to talk of the beauty of the night, of the cloudlike faintness of the sails sweeping through the liquid dusk, in a manner and in a voice as though he was absolutely insensible to the oddity of his appearance, and to the notions which his mysterious behaviour must excite. Piqued by his cool indifference I could not help saying:

"Why not join us aft, Mr. Pellew? You will find some of the men very good fellows. They are not *all* General Primroses."

"But why are *you* not aft, Captain Swift?" he rejoined, and I knew that he was smiling by the tone of his voice.

"I came forward to listen to the fellow singing."

"Own now that you were bored."

This was so pat that I could find no better answer to it than a short laugh.

"The long and short of it is," he exclaimed abruptly and with energy, "I do not choose to mingle with the cabin passengers. All the society I may happen to require I shall be able to find in the forward part of the ship." He added with a note of haughtiness, "I trust that my taste or desires are sufficient to satisfy you as *reasons* for my choosing to hold aloof."

I was about to answer, when the figure of a man who, as Mr. Pellew spoke, had been approaching us from the direction of the poop, came to a halt immediately abreast of us with a suggestion of surprise in his manner of stopping. It was the chief mate, Mr. Freeman. He peered close into my face and exclaimed, "Oh, it is you, Captain Swift," and immediately added, "Pray, who is your friend? I believe I have not before met the gentleman."

"I am Mr. George Pellew," exclaimed my tall companion. "And who are you?"

"I am Mr. Freeman, chief officer of the *Light of Asia*, sir," rejoined the other in a rough sea voice of dignity and irritation. He seemed to reflect, then added in a changed tone, "I must apologize to you, sir. You are, of course,

a cabin passenger? I did not instantly recollect the name."

"Mr. Pellew and I share a berth between us," said I.

The dusky hand of the mate rose to the peak of his cap. "I truly beg your pardon," he began.

"No need whatever," interrupted Mr. Pellew, in a voice whose note of high breeding was sweetened by the cordiality he infused into it. "Not having before seen me, why should not you have imagined me a stowaway? The fact is, Mr. Freeman, I have kept my cabin partly because I have been sea-sick, and partly because I have no desire to join the company in the saloon. My amiable fellow-passenger, Captain Swift, is astonished that I should not haunt the decks as the rest do, and no doubt considers me in consequence as decidedly *wanting*."

"No, no," said I.

"But, surely, Mr. Freeman," he continued, "passengers are privileged to keep their cabins if they choose?"

"Certainly," exclaimed the mate.

"There is nothing in the Shipping Acts,

I believe, to compel a passenger to eat at the saloon table?"

"Not a syllable," replied the mate with a laugh.

"And," continued Mr. Pellew, "though I know the master of a ship is invested, and very properly invested, by the law with the most absolute, the most despotic powers, he cannot, even if he would, compel a passenger to mix with his fellows."

"A passenger has the right to do what he likes, sir," answered the mate, "subject of course to the rules which provide for the safety of a ship and for the security of the lives of the people on board of her."

"There is no menace to a vessel's safety in a passenger keeping his berth," said Mr. Pellew.

"None whatever," answered Mr. Freeman heartily. "But still, sir, you know, as a matter of health—and then again the voyage to India is a long one, and dull enough, heaven knows, even at its liveliest."

"But how much duller may it be made," exclaimed Mr. Pellew, "by the society of in-

sipid or stupid or argumentative or quarrelsome people?"

The mate could not stay to converse; he saluted again with another polite flourish of his hand to his cap, and disappeared in the obscurity forward on the errand that had brought him from the poop.

Through the illuminated windows of the cuddy front we could witness dimly the shapes of people seated or in motion; but we stood too far forward to discern faces. The brightness of those windows rendered profounder by contrast the gloom of the deck overhead, and I could only tell that there were people up there approaching the rail and then marching aft again in the regular sea patrol by hearing their voices coming and going. Eight bells were struck; the clear chimes swept past the ear and died out in faint music upon the starry distance over the side; the strains of the concertina ceased, there was the bustle of a change of watch, of a man going aft to relieve the wheel, of the soldiers descending to their quarters in the 'tween decks.

Mr. Pellew lighted another cigar, but showed

no disposition to quit the spot where I had found him. The mystery of his conduct made him better society to my mind than the people in the saloon, of whom, to be sure, I had scarce as yet made the acquaintance of more than half a dozen. I therefore filled my pipe afresh and lingered at his side with some hope of courting him into a sentence, however evasive, which should sharpen or satisfy the suspicion that was now a mere vexation for its vagueness; but so often as I directed the conversation to the passengers, so often indeed as I uttered any remark that was not of an absolutely impersonal character, the tendency of which threatened to swerve us in the smallest degree from conversation more or less idle and commonplace, his pause, his silence, was the completest hint of recoil, and once or twice of quiet resentment; and then he would go on talking of such stuff as the duties of a merchant mate, the worth of such a cargo as the *Light of Asia* carried, the height of the topmost sail, the main-royal, from the deck on which we stood. Once I asked him how long he proposed to remain in India, and he answered by calling my attention to the

"I THEREFORE FILLED MY PIPE AFRESH AND LINGERED AT HIS SIDE." 66

flight of a shooting-star, which on its vanishing left behind it a long wake or scoring of floating silver dust, that lingered for some moments. Half an hour of this sort of thing sufficed me, and emptying my pipe I left him stationed like a sentry by the side of the galley and strolled aft into the saloon.

IV

MR. CHARLES WORTLEY CUNNINGHAM

For some days nothing happened in any way worth mentioning. At this distance of time I cannot be sure of dates; but I believe we had been somewhere about a fortnight from England when, happening to be on the poop in the afternoon, I was accosted by the captain as I stood alone leaning over the ship's quarter engaged in an occupation I was never weary of —I mean watching the exquisite configurations of the snow-white foam as it slided over the dark-blue surface into the ship's wake in glittering bells, careering round the edge of gleaming eddies or gyrating in shapes of stars and the tendrils of plants, or seething past in cloudy masses of a cream-like softness. I had had very little to say to Captain Stagg. I do not

know that he was much liked by any of the passengers. He was convulsive enough in his bows, effusive enough in his sea courtesies to the nobs amongst us: to Sir Charles and his daughter, to Colonel and Mrs. Mowbray and the like; but there was tyranny in his handling of his men. I used to find something brutal in the coarse fling of his voice whenever he had occasion to let fly an order at his crew, and he was rough and gruff and insolent in his bearing to his officers—that is to say, when the poop was thin and he thought himself unwatched; otherwise when there was no lack of spectators he would uncouthly request the chief mate to "*be so good as to get so and so done*," or address the second mate with a "*Pray, Mr. Masters, walk forward, &c.*" The midshipmen hated and feared him, trembled when he arrived on deck, and watched him as though he carried a weapon which he might at any moment draw upon them.

Well, as I told you, he accosted me one afternoon as I stood gazing down upon the swirling wash of foam alongside.

"Busy, Captain Swift?"

"Nothing whatever to do," said I, turning upon him.

"I should like three words with you," said he.

"As many as you please, Captain."

"You share your cabin with a gentleman named Pellew?"

I nodded.

"I have been leaving a card upon him this afternoon in the sea-sense of visits," said he, with a grin which seemed to twist his mouth right into his cheek whilst his nose appeared to edge more directly the other way; "he is a very fine gentleman, quite a splendid man, I declare. Odd he should have been my passenger all this while and that I should never have seen him before. But he is perfectly well?"

"In health you mean? Oh yes, I should say he's perfectly well."

"Has he given you a reason for his clinging to his cabin—for his never putting in an appearance on deck or in the cuddy?"

"No, nor have I troubled myself to ask him for a reason."

"'HAS HE GIVEN YOU A REASON, CAPTAIN SWIFT, FOR HIS CLINGING TO HIS CABIN?'"

"He told me plainly," said he, "that he dislikes society, that if the accommodation of the ship had permitted he would have hired two berths, one to serve him as a sitting-room, the other as a bedroom, so that he could always be wholly alone if he chose."

"I suppose," said I, "in your time you have sailed with passengers whose tastes were a little odd and perplexing?"

"Many and many," he answered, driving his hands deep into his breeches pockets and bestowing a singular leer of self-complacency upon me. "In the Australian trade there's some sort of sociability to be found; but amongst Anglo-Indians, 'specially gents who are in your profession—and perhaps I shouldn't say *that* either, for, upon my word, I lay it mostly to the account of the ladies—there's a deal of—what shall I call it? Lord! how easily may a man's good sense be stumped by the want of a word! Well, I mean this: that to satisfy the outwards, I won't say the homewards, folks in this trade a ship ought to be made up of separate living and sleeping rooms like a hotel; there should be no communication

unless desired; no public table save for those who choose to sit at it."

"You exactly express Mr. Pellew's motive for holding aloof, so far as I can gather it," said I.

"How do you and him get on?" said he, with a small forecastle lapse in his speech.

"Very well indeed."

"Find him perfectly straight-headed?"

"You need only meet his eye to know that," said I, laughing.

"Does he talk in his sleep?"

"He rests as peacefully as a dog-tired sailor," I replied.

"Then he's quiet enough, though he'll snore if he's after that pattern," said he, with a nod and a grin. "Well, sir, I thought I would ask you about him. Certainly he's a very fine gentleman. He's not a nobleman, d'ye think, shipped under a false name?"

"I can answer nothing, for I know nothing," I responded.

"Not that he need be a nobleman to be fine-looking, either," said he, spitting into the sea; "I only want to satisfy my mind that all's right with him," and he touched his forehead.

"You may make your mind perfectly easy on that score."

He reflected a little, with his eyes fixed upon the horizon, and then said, "If you can induce him to show himself on deck by day I shall be glad. He needn't eat in the cabin; he needn't speak to any one; I'll give the passengers a hint; they're people of manners, and I warrant him he sha'n't be stared at. But his keeping below, only coming up when it's dark, and so fine a gentleman as he is, too—why, ye see, Captain Swift, it'll lead to talk, and by and by to a little uneasiness. The people 'll think that he's gone and done something wrong, and dursen't show himself in consequence. Let him make his appearance—on the quarter-deck if he likes; he can easily keep clear of the poop all the same as if he was a steerage passenger," and thus speaking he rolled over to the binnacle to examine the compass and resumed his station to windward of the wheel.

I have said that this conversation occurred during an afternoon when we had been about ten days out from England. It left no impression upon my mind. I had long foreseen that

the attention of the captain would be provoked by Mr. Pellew's curious behaviour, and whilst the issue was uncertain, that is to say, whilst I could only speculate on the attitude Captain Stagg would adopt—whether he would leave Mr. Pellew to tranquilly enjoy his cabin, or by the exercise of his authority oblige him to conform to the routine of shipboard life; whilst this issue was uncertain, I say, I would feel an interest that was sometimes almost lively in the matter. But now, as it seemed, it was a settled affair. If *I* could coax Mr. Pellew into showing himself on deck by day, so much the better; if not, then there was nothing to be done; Mr. Pellew was evidently within his rights; the captain might remonstrate or advise, but he could not command, and the passengers might talk as they chose and think as they pleased.

It happened on this day, whilst waiting in the saloon with others for the ladies to arrive to dinner, that a cabin door immediately opposite where I stood was opened and Miss Primrose stepped out. It was her berth: this I had not before known—indeed I had imagined that she slept next to her father's cabin,

which was on the starboard side of the ship, well aft. Her maid held the door open whilst she passed out, and continued to hold it open for a sufficient space of time to enable me to obtain not only a view of the interior of the compartment, but a sight of a thick rope called a shroud which almost perpendicularly ruled the large circular glass of the porthole.

This shroud was clothed with what at sea is termed "chafing gear"—mats, split bamboos, tarred canvas, and the like. In the case of this particular shroud the chafing gear that protected it from the fret of ropes was formed of some thickly knitted heavily tarred material to which I am unable to give a name, but which made me instantly recognize it as one that descended to a dead-eye in the mizzen-channel, the ledge of which, as I have before written, overhung the porthole that belonged to the cabin shared by Mr. Pellew and me. I knew this; because one day when idly overhanging the side, and looking down upon the mizzen-channel, I had amused myself by localizing the exact situation of our berth, and I made out that our cabin window was close against the iron fasten-

ing, or chain plate as it is termed, one end of which was bolted to the ship's side, whilst to the other end that penetrated the edge of the channel was secured the dead-eye through which were rove the lanyards that fastened the shroud which ruled the window of Miss Primrose's berth.

Now all this, which has taken me some time to write, simply signified a discovery to which, as you may suppose, I attached no possible significance at the time: namely, that Miss Primrose's berth was exactly over Mr. Pellew's and mine; that the two portholes were directly in a vertical line, so that but for the interposition of the wide shelf of the mizzen-channel a man—say a tall man; such a figure as Mr. Pellew's, for example—could, by standing on the rim of the lower port, grasp the edge of the upper one.

I had also time to observe whilst the maid held the door open that only one of the two bunks under the porthole was furnished with bedding, whence it was clear that the girl slept alone. This privilege had doubtless been secured by an early application from the

General for accommodation, possibly at an increase in the rate of fares. He might have a reason of his own for desiring an unshared berth for his daughter. The intimacy of successive nights of companionship must tempt her into a degree of communicativeness which Sir Charles would find inconvenient, for he might easily guess that the lady to whom she disclosed her secret—and a sad and most melancholy secret undoubtedly was hers if there be any virtue in female beauty to express feelings of secret and consuming wretchedness—would have some confidential friend on board to whom to impart it, and so the truth would thread its way from ear to ear in whispers.

But the bustle of dinner, the obligation of listening and replying, speedily drove all thoughts of Miss Primrose out of my head.

I withdrew to my berth that night shortly after ten o'clock. The wind on deck was wet with driving drizzle; and in the saloon there was nothing better to do than to watch Sir Charles, Colonel Mowbray, and two others playing at whist, and to listen to the chatter of four or five of the passengers assembled at the

other end of the table. I expected, as usual, to find Mr. Pellew in his bunk, asleep, or at least suggesting by his posture and air the now familiar indisposition to talk at that hour of the night. Instead, he was seated in a Madeira chair, smoking a cheroot, and reading a novel by the light of a bracket-lamp affixed to the bulkhead. The moment I entered he closed the volume, looked at his watch, and exclaimed, "I did not know it was so late. Are you going to turn in?"

"Yes," I answered; "there is nothing to be done above. The night is wet and dirty, and it is so confoundedly dull in the saloon that I am beginning to think your manner of making a voyage is, after all, the best theory for living out one's passage of life on board ship."

He looked at me earnestly. I seemed to find on a sudden a new meaning in his handsome, his incomparably handsome face, an expression of emotional resolution, which I had never before found in his calm, collected, haughty countenance.

"I hope you are not sleepy," said he; "I should enjoy a quiet chat with you."

"I am sleepy merely for the want of a quiet chat," I answered.

He handed me his cigar-case and I lighted a cheroot. Needless to say that smoking was *not* permitted below. Nevertheless he was seldom without a cigar in his mouth, and, wrongly or rightly, we now smoked.

"I received a visit from the captain to-day," said he, crossing his legs and settling himself in his chair in the manner of one who intends that the sitting he has entered upon shall not be hastily ended. "He was my second visitor. Did I tell you that the doctor of the ship honoured me with a call three days ago?"

"No. He found you quite well, I hope?"

"I did not ask him for an opinion. What is the captain's name?"

"Stagg."

"It should be Bear. Surely he is too rough and unpolished an animal for the civilities and elegances and hospitality of an East Indiaman's saloon, full of ladies and gentlemen, some of them high and mighty, I dare say."

"He told me this afternoon that he had paid you a visit."

"Ha!" he exclaimed; and with a smile added, "How did he describe me?"

"He was all admiration; but he is very anxious that I should tempt you to the deck. He fears that the passengers will presently begin to talk about the mysterious passenger below, and that their conjectures as to your motives will result in an uneasy feeling amongst them."

He thoughtfully stroked his moustache whilst he fixed his eyes upon the ash of his cigar, and for some moments, which may have run into a minute or two, there was silence between us. Speaking softly, but with abruptness,

"Captain Swift," said he, "may I communicate my secret to you?"

"That must be entirely for you to decide," I answered.

"You will be—you *must* be—the only living creature in the ship who has knowledge of it. No!" he paused as if he would correct himself, then continued with energy, yet preserving his wary softness of voice, "One other must know it: it will be you two only. That I may trust an English officer and a gentleman

up to the hilt, I need not say. What I am anxious to tell you must be your secret."

"It will be strange," said I, smiling, "if I have not already guessed it."

He viewed me inquiringly.

"I will ask the question, to be answered or not, as you please: Does your secret concern Miss Primrose?"

He started and stared at me, his fine eyes glowing with astonishment and alarm. "Good heavens!" he cried faintly, "is it known that I am on board?"

He was about to put twenty other questions. I interrupted him: "*Of course* it is known that you are on board. How on earth could it be otherwise? Here are you waited on every day by one of the stewards; then you tell me the doctor visited you, and then—"

"No, no," he exclaimed, with a change of countenance, "you misunderstand me. But how is it possible you should comprehend my meaning since you know nothing whatever of my story? But—Miss Primrose! What," he exclaimed, fixing his keen and burning gaze upon me, "caused you to associate *her* with my secret?"

"For the life of me I could not tell you," I answered. "The melancholy and beauty of her face interested me, I suppose, and then, I dare say, whilst in some hour lightly speculating about your reason for keeping in hiding, it might have dimly occurred to me that Miss Primrose was one reason, at all events, for your self-banishment from the light of day."

"Have you suggested this suspicion to any one?"

"To no one."

"Well, Captain Swift," he exclaimed, with a glance round, as though fearful of the very walls of the cabin, "I may frankly tell you that you have anticipated the point of the story I intend to relate. In three words I may say that Miss Primrose and I are betrothed, and that, unknown to her father, and even at this moment unknown to herself, I am accompanying her to India."

I composed myself to listen, and perhaps not without some small emotion of disappointment, for in truth I had expected a larger, a more gallant and dramatic disclosure, something to lift

the impassioned commonplace of love for which I was prepared to a heroic height.

"First of all," he proceeded, "I must tell you that my name is not George Pellew. These sounds I assume for the purpose of the voyage. My real name is Charles Wortley Cunningham. My father, who died four years ago, was Sir Stuart Wortley Cunningham, knight, for many years Governor of——" and he named one of the West India Islands.

He paused as though awaiting some exclamation of surprise; but I sat quietly listening, nor did I think proper to tell him that even in this little article of his confession I had been ahead of him, since, from the moment when he had first pronounced the name of Pellew I had instinctively suspected it false.

"Eight months ago," he continued, "I met Miss Primrose at a dance at Bath. She and her father were then in lodgings in Pulteney Street. I fell in love with her, and with her father's full consent we became engaged. He exactly knew my expectations: that I am an only son, that on the death of my mother I inherit an estate in Suffolk and fifteen hundred

a year, that my antecedents are as unimpeachable as his own, though it would be impossible for any man to have a higher opinion of his descent than Sir Charles Primrose. He seemed perfectly satisfied—you must know the General is a widower—and his daughter and I," he went on, with a new light of beauty coming into his face with the flush that was now on his cheek, and with the brilliance of emotion that was now in his eyes, "were happy—happy indeed, in our love. The marriage was fixed to take place on the 14th of last month. The General returned with his daughter to London —his house was in Hanover Square; I followed, and day after day Geraldine—Miss Primrose, I mean—and I were together. But Sir Charles was a man desperately hard to get on with. His temper is incredibly bad, his vanity enormous, and his capacity of insulting people whom he dislikes or who venture to oppose his quite commonplace view of things—for he is a very stupid man, the stupidest man I know, though professionally distinguished—his talent of affront, I say, is so exceptional that I used to wonder he had ever been spared to see his

present years—that he had not been shot out of or kicked out of or cudgelled out of existence long ago.

"What I am about to say you will be slow to believe. I was dining at his house; he and his daughter and two or three others were present at the table. The sickening, the intolerable topic of politics was started. An assertion was made: I opposed it, but without the least temper. Sir Charles thundered some mortifying, almost insulting expression at me. It was not in flesh and blood to keep silent, and I rejoined. And how did that argument end?" he cried, springing erect in his wrath and towering over me as I sat looking up at his flushed face whilst with his right fist he seemed to menace some object behind me. "He ordered me to leave the table—to leave the house! He sprang from his chair, black in the face with rage, and could scarcely make himself intelligible to his butler, whom he told to open the door and see me out! I was so astounded, so dumbfounded by the fellow's extravagant insolence, that for some moments I could only stare at him, believing him raving mad. On

"ON THIS HE STEPPED TO THE DOOR, WHICH HE PULLED WIDER OPEN, THRUSTING HIS BUTLER ASIDE TO DO SO, AND ASKED AS THOUGH HE WERE CHOKING WHETHER I MEANT TO GO OR NOT."

this he stepped to the door, which he flung wide open, thrusting his butler aside to do so, and asked, as though he were choking, whether I meant to go or not. I then lost all control; but for his daughter being present, I believe I should have flogged the fellow round his own inhospitable table. I was too mad with temper to know what I said."

He resumed his seat, breathing fast, and seemed at a loss as though his mind had been hurried away from its subject by the angry tide of memory. Then rising afresh, he stole to the door and looked out into the passage betwixt the cabins. He was cool when he returned to his seat, and exclaimed with a smile that he hoped he had not greatly raised his voice whilst speaking.

"I do not think so."

"Well," continued Mr. Cunningham, as I must now call him, addressing me in soft but firm accents with the flush gone out of his cheeks, his eyes cold again, and his features as composed and resolved as ever they had shown at any time within these ten days, "you will suppose after this that so far as General Sir

Charles Primrose was concerned, my engagement to his daughter was at an end. I sent him a letter of humble apology. I was a contemptible rascal to abase myself so! but I wrote for Geraldine's sake, and the letter was returned to me in halves with the seal unbroken. I called—perfect fool that I was—;" he bit his lip to the memory of some insult which he could not find it in him to communicate. "Geraldine wrote to me; I was to forgive her father; he had suffered from sunstroke in India; there were times when he was not responsible for his behaviour. But she wrote as if with a broken heart, and though she prayed me to have patience, to continue to love her, to preserve my faith in her devotion, yet there was a tone of hopelessness in her letter impossible to miss. The reply I addressed to her came back to me torn, with the seal unbroken as in the case of my letter to her father. I then found out that she had been sent into the country, but in what part she was I could not discover; till one day I received a note from her saying that her father was under orders for India; that he was sailing on such

and such a day, and that she was to accompany him. She would have written to me every day —every hour she said, but she was so closely watched that she could not take a pen in her hand without being challenged; it would have been equally impossible for her to receive a reply from me, and the letter that she was now sending, which in fact I was reading, she feared might never reach my hands, though she had heavily bribed a housemaid to steal with it to the post." He glanced at his watch. "I fear now that I have gone far enough and that I am beginning to bore you," said he.

"Not in the least. I am exceedingly interested. Besides, I have seen enough of Sir Charles to know exactly how to sympathize with you."

"Well, to make an end. I adored Miss Primrose, and had not the least intention of losing her; but I stood the chance of losing her if she sailed to India and left me behind in England. Knowing the date on which they were to start, I looked through the shipping lists and found this vessel named for that day. To make sure of them, I called at the office of the owners and

ascertained that cabins had been taken for Sir Charles Primrose, Miss Primrose, and her maid. I at once booked a passage for myself, but found the ship was so full that I must be content to share a berth. I gave my name as George Pellew, and joined the ship in the dusk of the evening at the East India Docks. The General and his daughter, I ascertained, came on board at Gravesend."

Finding him silent, I exclaimed—hardly indeed knowing what else to say—"You have embarked on a queer adventure."

"Miss Primrose and I are together," said he, with a flash in his eyes.

"But," said I, lighting the stump of my cigar, "what do you hope that India will do for you? The General will proceed to his station or district. He will of course carry his daughter with him. If you follow, your presence will be quickly discovered—and what then?"

He merely smiled, eying me steadfastly and knowingly.

"The climate of India," said I, laughing, "does not improve the temper. Mere dislike

in the cool latitude of London may easily become consuming hate in a country of curry, mosquitoes, brandy pawnee, and vertical suns."

"Miss Primrose and I are together," he repeated.

"Yes, you are certainly in the same ship," said I.

"Well, Captain Swift," said he, with an air that made me see he had no intention to submit his programme to me, "I hope I have fully satisfied you as to my motives for keeping in hiding here?"

"Fully."

"And now will you do me a favour? It will indeed be an act of singular kindness."

"I shall be most happy to oblige you."

"To this moment Miss Primrose is in ignorance that I am on board. I have no means of communicating with her. I dare not trust the fellow who waits upon me—no, though I should tip him ten pounds for every letter he delivers to her. The first letter!—the first intimation!—consider the tact such a delivery must require to guard against astonishment and alarm

betraying her. Will *you* hand her a note from me?"

"You must know I have not yet had the pleasure of making her acquaintance."

"But on board ship there is no ceremony. One addresses whom one pleases. I beg you to understand that having obtained this very great favour at your hands, I should not dream of again troubling you. I am only now desirous that she should know I am on board."

"I shall be very happy," I exclaimed, "to give your letter to her."

He rose and grasped me by the hand, thanking me warmly.

But though, after a swift debate in my mind, I had consented to serve him—my disposition to oblige, or, in other words, my good-nature, scarcely suffering me to consider seriously how far I should be discreet in bearing any, the most insignificant, part in this questionable shipboard drama upon which the curtain was about to rise—I was also secretly resolved that the first step I took in it should be my last. Indeed, as I sat musing over his story whilst he continued to address me, I could hardly per-

suade myself that he had given me the whole truth. It seemed incredible that Sir Charles should have acted with the unspeakable insolence, the brutal discourtesy, that Mr. Cunningham had affirmed of him. And yet I was forced to admit that quarrels of a much more violent sort than had happened between these two men originated in arguments. Even the worthy old Vicar of Wakefield was, as we all know, quite ready to sacrifice the happiness of his son George and Miss Arabella Wilmot to his opinions on the subject of monogamy.

Until hard upon midnight, I think it was, did we sit talking in that cabin. Our quarters were sunk deep in the ship, and never a sound penetrated to us from the deck. No other noises broke the stillness than the sobbing and yearning wash of water along the ship's side, the creaking of the cargo in the hold, and the straining of bulkheads and the lighter fittings as the vessel rolled. People were sleeping on either hand of us and opposite, but saving now and again when angry recollections forced a note of vehemence into Mr. Cunningham's articulation, his speech had been low and soft, with

a melody of its own that was like singing, and that rendered what was affecting in his references singularly plaintive and pathetic, whilst it enriched even to nobility every utterance of scorn, or contempt, or indignation. There was no cause to fear then that a syllable of our talk had been overheard.

The longer I conversed with him the more I found myself fascinated by his beauty and individuality. There was never anything striking in what he said, yet his most trivial expression was made memorable by his manner, his grace, his dignity, by his speaking eyes, by the twenty physical charms my recollection carries. All reserve was now gone; he asked me question after question about Miss Primrose—what I thought of her—how she looked—if she appeared well—if she associated with the other passengers—her father's treatment of her so far as I could judge, and so on, and so on.

It was whilst endeavouring to deal with this lover-like fusillade that cocking my thumb up at the ceiling of the cabin I said: "By the way, I should have told you that you and Miss Primrose are separated by a few planks only."

He looked upwards, and exclaimed in a low voice: "Do you mean that her cabin is overhead there?"

I nodded.

"Do you know for certain?" he cried, sending a glance at the porthole as he spoke, whilst his face took an odd expression of mingled enthusiasm and incredulity.

"For certain," I replied, and I repeated to him the observation I had made of her cabin that afternoon.

He bit upon his underlip, was silent for some moments, and his countenance lost its glow.

"You say she is the only occupant of the cabin?" said he. "Where does her maid sleep?"

"I do not know. Somewhere down here, I fancy. Once in the saloon I saw her emerge by the steps which conduct to these parts."

He slightly smiled, and again glanced at the porthole. I looked at his square shoulders and involuntarily laughed, immediately adding (that he might know *why* I laughed): "You will never be able to squeeze through that hole."

"No," he answered. "Nor is it to be enlarged, unfortunately."

"But even were you slim enough to crawl through it," said I, "you could not communicate with the cabin window above. Consider the wide spread of channel platform; and whilst you were clinging to one of the iron bars which hold it to the ship's side, a spray might come and wash you away, as Dibdin's song says of some poor Jack." I ended the sentence with an irrepressible yawn.

"I believe you are right," said he, looking at his watch, and we forthwith "turned in."

V

I DELIVER THE LETTER

Mr. Cunningham had risen and finished his letter before I awoke next morning. The composition of the missive—in a physical sense I mean—must have been a labour of some severity; for during the night it had come on to blow a strong breeze of wind off the beam, and a snappish sea, with a touch of fierceness sometimes in its frequent hurls, was charging in bursts of thunder to the side of the ship on which our cabin was situated, and blinding the porthole with smothering heaps of glittering green brine that eclipsed the light in the berth and gave one nothing to look at but the dim twinkle of the wet circle of glass. But the letter was written, and when I was dressed I put it in my pocket; bothered, however, by having

to call him Cunningham when the name of Pellew was the familiar one.

"Indeed," said I, "I wish you had not given me your real name. If I have occasion to speak of you my memory may play me a trick, and I shall be calling you Cunningham when everybody who has heard of you at all understands that you are Pellew."

"Pray be on your guard," he exclaimed.

Unpleasant as the weather was, there was a full attendance of the passengers at breakfast. Miss Primrose occupied her usual place next her father, and my eyes were incessantly going towards her as I worked away with my knife and fork, pondering how I should approach her, and conjecturing the reception she would give the intelligence of her sweetheart being in the ship. Was she of an hysterical nature? Suppose she should shriek out, behave extravagantly, or faint away when I broke the news to her, or when she opened the letter and read the truth for herself! The situation in that case would be an exceedingly disagreeable one for me. General Primrose was by no means a gentleman whom one would wish to quarrel with—

at least on board ship, where one would be forced into incessant sight of or contact with him. Here were we no more than eleven days out; there might be four months of sailing before the pilot should board us off the Sandheads; and those four months must be rendered the most unpleasant of any in my life should it come to the knowledge of General Primrose and of Captain Stagg that Mr. Cunningham *alias* Pellew was on board, and that I was acting as a go-between for him and Miss Primrose.

I was nervous and made but a poor breakfast, and was found so thoughtful and incommunicative that my neighbours at table gave up addressing me. But I had given my word to Mr. Cunningham, and the promise must be kept. There was no change in the demeanour of Miss Primrose. As she was when I had first noticed her, so did she still appear: the same unheeding girl, her eyes downwards bent with nun-like persistency, faintly smiling and scarcely looking up if accosted, and answering, so far as I might judge, barely above her breath, and in the briefest sentences, as though articulation were a distress, and a moment's divergence

from the current of her thoughts a pain and a perplexity to her.

I eyed her father somewhat strenuously, and believed I could find in his countenance all necessary confirmation of Mr. Cunningham's story. His expression was unpleasantly fierce. No doubt his heavy eyebrows, the angry curl of his moustache, the tiger-like tension of his whiskers, heightened the formidableness of his looks; but it was quite possible to separate him from that aspect of haughty impassioned austerity with which nature had clothed him—to distinguish in short the difference between character and hair, between a sluggish liver and thick eyebrows, between wire-like whiskers and a highly excitable temperament.

Once the ship's doctor at my side asked me how my cabin-fellow Mr. Pellew did, and whether he had not some reason much more extraordinary than any he had chosen to give for lying hidden; and once he asked me in a bantering tone—for in my time there was always something of the wag, and often of the tipsy wag, in the typical ship's doctor—if I had lost my heart to Miss Primrose, since I seemed

unable to remove my eyes from her; but my short answers rendered sullen by uneasiness silenced him.

I went out on to the quarter-deck when I had breakfasted, and found a very uninviting scene of ship and ocean. The decks were dark with wet; as the vessel rolled to windward the froth of the green seas rushing at us from out the haze of the near horizon glanced ghastly and melancholy above the tall rail of the bulwark; there was a dreary shrill whistling of the wet wind in the iron-taut weather shrouds, and in the slack damp-blackened rigging curved to leeward by the rush of the blast. Yet the ship under comparatively small canvas was sailing nobly, shouldering off the blows of the olive-coloured surge with volcanic shocks of her bow as she plunged, and flinging the sea into boiling froth to right and left of her as she went, so that from aloft the path of her keel must have resembled the sweeping career of the foaming foot of the waterspout.

My prospects as a messenger of love looked exceedingly meagre and contemptible in the face of this weather, which of course must

confine all the passengers to the saloon and provide me with the slenderest of all chances of finding Miss Primrose alone. And yet strangely enough some while after eleven o'clock it so fell out that on descending from the poop, where I had been trudging in a pea-coat with a young officer, and taking a peep into the long interior through the window I saw Miss Primrose seated at the foremost end of the table—that is to say, the end the most remote from where her father's cabin was and from her place at meals—writing, as I might suppose, in a diary. A few ladies were at the aftermost part of the saloon reading, sewing, and talking. The rest of the people were either on the poop —for the rain had now ceased, though it still blew a fresh breeze of wind—or in their cabins.

"This," thought I, "must be my chance;" and being resolved to make an end of a business that grew more and more distasteful to me in proportion as I delayed the execution of it, I walked in. No purpose was to be served by any sort of ambiguity in my first address. There was an item of intelligence to impart, and the place—the opportunity—my own de-

sire to get quit of my errand—rendered it certain that the sooner the news was communicated the better. I approached and placed myself on her right that I might conceal her from the view of the ladies in the after part of the saloon; yet it was necessary to start with some conventional commonplace.

"I have the pleasure of addressing Miss Primrose?"

She started and raised her pen from the book in which she was writing, whilst she lifted her sad and beautiful eyes to my face with a slight expression of surprise in her countenance.

"I have a cabin companion," said I, speaking low but swiftly. "You may have heard him spoken of as the mysterious passenger. He has asked me to give you this. The handwriting will tell you who he is;" and so speaking, I put the letter down upon the table before her.

She glanced at her name that was written in a bold hand upon the envelope; instantly a burning blush covered her face and as much of the neck as was revealed by the collar of her dress; but almost as quickly as one could look the scarlet glow was replaced by a pallor that

seemed the deadlier for the contrast of the hue that had preceded it. I believed that my fears were to be realized — that she would shriek out and then faint! Never had I imagined that the workings of the human heart could have found such visible, such poignant expression in flesh and blood as I witnessed in her. I felt that I had no right to look—my gaze was an impiety, a profanity, an audacious peering into a sacred mystery the sheltering curtain of which had been ruthlessly rent. Yet I dared not leave her side until, to use the expressive old word, she had recollected herself, for there were shrewd female eyes in the neighbourhood and on the alert, and the interposition of my form alone protected her from their gaze. Expression after expression crossed her face; she breathed with such difficulty that every instant I feared some outbreak of hysteria in her; there was hardness and wildness in her eyes as she turned them from the letter to me and from me to the letter again.

All this might have occupied two or three minutes at the outside. Suddenly she slipped

the letter into her pocket, rose with a little stagger in her manner of erecting her figure,

"SHE WENT TO HER CABIN, THE DOOR-HANDLE OF WHICH SHE SEEMED TO GROPE FOR AS THOUGH SHE WERE BLIND."

and picking up her book sought to address me; her lips moved inarticulately, she faintly bowed, and trembling from head to foot went to her cabin, the door-handle of which she seemed to grope for as though she were blind, and then, not a little to my relief, she disappeared.

I was as much agitated by sympathy as by the character of the delicate and distasteful mission, and was sensible that my heart beat faster than usual as I sent a hasty glance at the ladies to remark if they appeared to have observed Miss Primrose's sudden withdrawal; but they were reading, gossiping, sewing as before, and I stepped out again on to the quarter-deck to soothe my fluttered nerves with a cigar and to reinforce by several powerful vows my resolution to take no further part in this business, unless indeed it were to convey to Mr. Cunningham the girl's answer to his letter, should she write to him, simply because I quite understood if she asked me to do so I should be unable to withstand the entreaty of her sweetness and her sorrow.

I went some paces forward that I might obtain a view of the poop, and perceived Sir

Charles and Colonel Mowbray marching up and down it. Had he seen me accost his daughter? The foremost saloon skylight was almost immediately over that part of the table at which she had been seated; and if the General looked down then he must have seen us. I waited until his return walk brought him to the forward extremity of the deck; but he continued hot in altercation, or in conversation that resembled it. I won no more regard from him than did the mainmast or the pump. Now, I knew he was a sort of man who would have stared very hard at me, very hard and very fiercely at me, had his glance, lighting upon the skylight, penetrated to me and his daughter; and this I say because she had held herself markedly aloof from all us males; so that, had he seen us together, he would have been struck, and paused perhaps to observe us. That he did not stare at me, that he took no notice whatever of me, was assurance enough that he had seen nothing, and I returned to the shelter of the recess to finish my cigar.

Miss Primrose did not appear at tiffin, the bell for which was rung at one o'clock. The

General on taking his seat missed her from his side, rose, and walked with ramrod-like erectness to her berth. He returned in a few minutes, and I heard him, in response to an inquiry from Mrs. Mowbray, exclaim in his hard voice of command that "Miss Primrose was suffering from a headache." That was all, and he at once fell to his soup. When lunch was ended I went below for my pipe and tobacco—how enormous is one's consumption of tobacco at sea! but what else can one do but smoke?—and to inform Mr. Cunningham that I had given his letter to Miss Primrose. I found him stalking about the cabin with the air of a lunatic in a padded cell.

"At last!" he cried, as I entered. "Gracious powers! how long the time has been. What have you to tell me?"

"She has your letter," I answered.

"My *dear* fellow!" he exclaimed, grasping my hand with a squeeze that left the finger-ends bloodless, "how can I thank you sufficiently?" And then came a whole broadside of questions. What did she say? How had I introduced the matter? Did she immediately recognize his

handwriting? Having satisfied him on these and a score or two of other points, I said:

"You will of course expect an answer from her? Now, who is to deliver it?"

"You, you!" he cried; "you, my dear friend, for a friend indeed you have proved to her and to me."

"Well now, Mr. Cunningham," said I, "I will do this: if she asks me to give you a letter, I will bring it to you; but that done—*no more*, if you please. I am not of the profession that is distinguished for cowardice; but all the same, I have no desire, no intention indeed, to run foul of General Primrose, with whom I must necessarily be locked up in this ship for the next three or four months. The voyage will inevitably be dull; but I do not wish it to be tragical."

"Enable me this once," he cried, "to receive a reply from her, and I shall not again even dream of troubling you."

Well, I saw no more of Miss Primrose that afternoon until the dinner hour came round, and it was in the moment of my wondering whether she would show herself, that the door

of her cabin opened and she stepped forth. Her eyes sought me; they rested on my face for an instant only. How am I to convey the expression of them? Was it delight? Was it gratitude? For the first time since I had beheld her, a smile lay in the soft depth of her gaze like a light there; a delicate smile, too, gave a new character of sweetness to her beauty as her glance for a heart-beat or two met mine. You would have supposed her visited and possessed by a new spirit. There was an elasticity in her movements, a life in her manner of looking, a suggestion of freedom, of liberty, operating in her as an impulse in her whole bearing, and especially in the carriage of her head, as she went round the table to her chair and seated herself.

"No headache now," thought I, "and no heartache either, seemingly!" I watched the General as he took his place. Without turning his head he seemed to take a view of her out of the corners of his eyes, sending his black and searching gaze over the angry white curl of the moustache upon his cheek sheerly to her profile, as though his vision were a corkscrew

laterally directed. He addressed her and she responded. He was clearly surprised by the change in her, and I observed that he pricked his ear whilst she replied to the sympathetic questions and congratulations of the people at her end of the table. Indeed, there was a clear ring in her voice as she answered that the headache was much better—that it had been wholly due, she believed, to the motion of the ship; in a word, responding at length and fixing her eyes upon those she addressed with lingering smiles which warranted them of the heart.

"Well now," thought I to myself, "what will this remarkable change in her be attributed to?" It was a sort of comedy in its way, not without a quality of humour sufficiently defined to bring the performance perilously close to the kind of pathos we look for in tragedy. I, who of all that company alone stood behind the scenes, I, who knew more and saw more than General Primrose himself, watched this strange little shipboard play with an interest that would have been impossible had the rest of us been in the secret. Sir Charles spoke little; during the intervals of

the meal he was incessantly pulling out his whiskers or curling his moustache, occasionally glancing askant at his daughter. Puzzled indeed he was, as were others too, for the matter of that. The ship's doctor, whose eyes at meal-times were incessantly travelling over the company, whispered to me to observe the improvement in Miss Primrose's spirits.

"Were this ship a hotel ashore, you know, Swift," said he, with the tone and speech of familiarity that I disliked in him, "one would suppose Miss Primrose had received a bit of good news—an offer of marriage from a nobleman, or a letter from a firm of solicitors announcing a legacy of a few cool thousands. But what can happen at sea to improve the animal spirits? The cause, then, must be physical. It may be a mere matter of nerves—some abrupt effect of oxygenation of blood. The fact is, Swift, we are wonderfully and fearfully made. The wonderfulness of it I don't mind, but the fearfulness of it I strongly object to."

I suffered him to talk himself out, and when dinner was over stepped, as usual, into the recess under the forward part of the poop, where I

was joined by two or three fellows, and there we stood talking and smoking. The weather had improved; there were a few lean stars sliding betwixt the squares of the rigging, and the half-moon floated dim and moist over our waving mast-heads, with a weak silver ring around her.

"How deuced sick a fellow gets of hearing that hissing noise of water alongside," exclaimed one of my companions, Lieutenant Elphinstone. "I'd rather be a private in the Army than an admiral in the Navy."

"There must be a sort of music in that melancholy noise for some ears," said another young officer. "Burton, did you observe—Elphinstone you knaaw can't see—the change in a certain young party who don't sit forty miles off from the General?"

"Good Ged, yes," rejoined Burton, who wore an eye-glass. "What d'ye want to make out, Cobb? That she's got a fresh stock of spirits in through her cabin port-hole out of what Smithers would call the demmed music of the waters?"

"Order, order," whispered Elphinstone; and

following the direction of his eye as he looked into the saloon through a window, I saw Miss Primrose approaching.

There was nobody in sight saving the stewards, who were stripping the tables. The clear light of the lamps streamed through the windows on to the quarter-deck, and plainly disclosed us to any one within. I imagined that the girl on seeing me would pause, as a hint for me to approach, making sure that I should interpret her object in seeking me; and with the velocity of thought I figured her embarrassment, her change of countenance, the conflict of emotions in her eyes, as she tremblingly handed me her reply to her sweetheart's note. Greatly to my astonishment, she stepped through the door on to the open deck, her head uncovered and her luxuriant hair trembling in the lamplight in dull gold to the shrewd draughty sweep of the wind in the recess, and said:

"I thought I should find you here, Captain Swift. These are the lines you were admiring so much;" and so saying, she put a letter into my hand, and with a sweet smile and easy bow re-entered the saloon, giving me no time indeed

to act any part even if astonishment had not rendered an instant assumption impossible.

"'THESE ARE THE LINES YOU WERE ADMIRING SO MUCH.'"

My companions' surprise, though proceeding from a different cause, equalled mine. They

had never before seen me speak to this girl—this daughter of General Sir Charles Primrose, whom we addressed as "sir," and viewed from afar with emotions of awe; they had believed, as I knew in fact, that she held herself almost as much apart, so to speak, as my mysterious, and to them utterly unknown, fellow-passenger; and now they had beheld her smiling sweetly upon me, handing me some verses, or some sentences of prose copied by her own hand, suggesting indeed a degree of positive intimacy by her careless manner of coming out without her hat, and by her swift but sweetly managed retreat, as though she had been scared by the sight of them, and would have stayed had they been away.

"By Ged then!" said young Elphinstone, "it's altogether a doocid deal too killing, d'ye knaaw. How on earth have you managed it, Swift? Into what holes and corners have you been getting that no fellow has had a sight of you and her together?"

"I say, Swift," drawled Burton, "what is it,—poetry? Read it out like a good fellow. Hang me if I shouldn't like to know what she admires in verse."

I threw my unfinished cigar overboard and stepped below to get rid of them, though I might well believe that my absence would only improve their opportunity to indulge their astonishment in conjectures and opinions. And the fellows talked with such a mess-room drawl, in voices so heedless of those who might be near, that, thought I to myself, as I made my way to Mr. Cunningham's berth, nothing more is needed to exquisitely complicate this singular sea-going drama than the overhearing of those young fellows' conversation by Sir Charles or by some one who should communicate what he had heard to him.

Mr. Cunningham sat in his Madeira arm-chair smoking a cigar as usual, with a bottle of champagne on the deck at his side. I extended the letter and he sprang to receive it.

"A million thanks," he cried, and his hand trembled with eagerness as without another word he opened the envelope and stepped close to the bracket-lamp to read.

It was a letter of four or five sheets, crossed and recrossed, and so absorbed was he by it, smiling all the while, sometimes nodding, and

once pausing, with a sigh that resembled a groan, to press it to his lips, that he suffered me to depart without making the least sign or removing his eyes from the thickly-scrawled page.

I returned an hour later, having spent most of the time between in reading a magazine that I had found upon a sofa in the saloon. Mr. Cunningham was clothed in his theatrical cloak; the shawl about his neck rose to his nostrils, and his soft felt wide-awake was pulled down over his eyebrows, so that there was nothing more to see of him than his nose. He freed his mouth to speak and exclaimed, "I have not thanked you nearly enough for your kindness."

"Indeed you have," said I. "Pray say no more about it. The rest you will be able to manage, and I heartily hope you will make a good ending of this romantic business."

"When did she give you the letter?" he asked, "and how did she contrive to do so?"

I told him very honestly all that had passed, and added that I was astonished by her coolness and self-possession.

"Ha!" he exclaimed, "what an illustration

is this of the power of love to make heroines of girls! What courage! what inventions! How much better under the circumstances the boldness, call it the pluck, that amazed you, Captain Swift, than the timid, reluctant, emotional approach! And yet there is not a timider creature than my sweet girl. Indeed, I have grieved that she cannot command more resolution; she would then be able to hold her father in check, have something of her way with him, even, in spite of the endevilment of the old coxcomb—" He broke off, and looking down himself, exclaimed in a changed voice, "Are there many people in the saloon?"

"A few."

"Is the General amongst them?"

"No."

"I am going on deck," said he, "to breathe the air."

"There are a few men, I believe," said I, "hanging about the entrance to the cabin."

"No matter," he answered, "let them look and let them think. There's little enough to see. Will you accompany me?"

"No," I said, "I may join you later on. I

presume you will station yourself at the galley as before. But if I am seen to pass through the saloon with you, I shall be pestered with questions, and I have made up my mind, Mr. Cunningham, not to know anything, not more for your sake than for my own. There is a number of young fellows on board, loose talkers and noisy in their chaff. Their badinage may prove dangerous; their references to you may tempt the General into inquiries; and you will forgive me for saying, that apart from what I have done, I must positively meddle no further with your affairs."

"Not *meddle!*" he cried in a cordial voice, whilst his fine eyes shone with the grateful and cheerful smile that was else concealed by his shawl and hat. "Do not speak of yourself as a meddler. You have acted the part of a true friend. But you are right. We must not be seen together."

He opened the door and passed out. I followed in about ten minutes, and walked to the recess but found it vacant. The few people in the saloon were assembled in the after part, and as the hatch through which Mr. Cunning-

ham had emerged lay well in the fore-part of the interior, it was as likely as not that he had passed through unobserved. As I paused in the recess with my eye at the window, the General, Colonel Mowbray, and two others came to the table and seated themselves for a rubber.

VI

THE GENERAL QUESTIONS ME

When I went to my cabin on the night of this same day that I have been writing about, I found a boat-hook in my bunk. A pole about six feet long with a spike and an iron hook at the end of it is an odd object to encounter in one's bed. I picked it up and was about to put it in the passage outside where the steward would find it and remove it, when Mr. Cunningham, whom I had found in bed and who I had thought was asleep, called out:

"Pray let that boat-hook remain, Captain Swift. It has cost me some trouble to procure and to smuggle it here."

"I found it in my bed," said I.

"I heartily apologize," he exclaimed; "I

believed I had put it in the corner with my bundle of sticks and umbrella."

It was not my business to inquire his motive in adding a boat-hook to the slender stock of cabin furniture; but one thing I guessed: that there must be some one on board—probably one of the crew—who was willing to serve him; because the boat-hook belonged to one of the quarter-boats; and the four quarter-boats swung from davits over the edge of the poop; so that as Mr. Cunningham was not likely to have shown himself upon the poop, some one must have sneaked aft and abstracted the boat-hook for him.

But it was not long before I discovered the use he designed the boat-hook for. It was next day indeed, during the afternoon, that on entering the berth I found him standing at the open porthole with his watch in one hand and the boat-hook in the other. The wind was off the beam on the side of our cabin and the heel of the hull rose the window above the sea-line, so that you saw nothing but the piebald sky through it. It had been a day of quiet weather; and the ship was sliding pleasantly at some

eight knots in the hour over the wide Atlantic heave that was scarred into lines of small billows by the brushing of the wind. Scarcely guessing what he would be at, yet judging that he wished to be private, I was about to withdraw.

"No, no, pray remain," he said; "I have no secrets from you. What time do you make it?"

I looked at my watch and gave him the hour —that is, the time by the clock in the saloon.

"Quite right," said he; and pocketing his watch he stood gazing intently through the porthole.

I watched him with curiosity, not in the least knowing what to expect. On a sudden he uttered an exclamation, and quickly thrusting the boat-hook through the porthole, he carefully but dexterously hauled in a length of thin line at the extremity of which was a letter folded very small, weighted by a piece of stuff which I afterwards discovered to be a lump of holystone. He removed the letter, thrice pulled the string or length of twine as a signal, and the attached piece of stone lying in the

port was jerked out and drawn upwards past the rim of the mizzen channel.

I guessed by the flush in his face and the sparkle in his eye that the letter was the first of these strategic communications. He shot a glance of triumph at me and eagerly read the missive.

"What think you of my idea of an ocean post-office?" said he, folding up the letter and stowing it away in his pocket as carefully as though it had been a thousand-pound Bank of England note.

"Why," said I, who had viewed this manœuvre with no little astonishment, "I think the device a very ingenious one. It must tax the young lady's cleverness, however, so to cast her weighted letter through the porthole as to insure it falling over the edge of that platform up there."

"She manages it, nevertheless," said he. "That platform provides us with the very shelter we desire. The stone passes swiftly through the window—too swiftly for the detection of any eye that may be looking over the side; and it might dangle for hours and for days

under that channel without being seen from any part of the ship's bulwarks."

My desire to share as little as possible in this strange, romantic business held me reticent, otherwise my curiosity was active enough to have tempted me into several inquiries. As I made my way on to the deck again I found myself smiling as I wondered what Sir Charles's sensations would be had he been an unobserved spectator of this boat-hook-and-catch-letter proceeding. Miss Primrose was manifestly a very resolved young lady. There was real audacity in her conduct now. Who would suspect the heroic capacity of resolution her love was compelling her to exhibit, concealed in such a perfectly feminine, such an adorably feminine aspect of modesty, sweetness, melancholy, timidity as one and all of us passengers witnessed in her? That piece of holystone! She must have obtained it by some strategy—feigned an interest in the stuff and asked to look at a piece of it on hearing that the sailors whitened the decks by scrubbing the planks with the stone. "And what will the issue be?" I remember thinking. "Will all this sincerity of passion

end in forcing the hand of the General? Is he a sort of man to be coaxed into compliance by such secret conspiracies, such dark underhand devices, as his objectionable and most reprehensible conduct had obliged this loving couple to be guilty of?" One had only to think of his face to say "*No!*" to that fancy with the utmost emphasis.

And now there went by a week with nothing in it that deserves chronicling. We penetrated the warm and sparkling parallels, caught the strong breath of the north-east trade-wind in the overhanging wings of studding-sails, and the noble ship drove along day and night, night and day veining the sea astern of her with a wake of liquid pearl, and smiting the blue billow with her coppered forefoot into yeast that was made radiant at intervals by the gossamer-like gleam of flying-fish. Once or twice after dark during this week I had spied the shadow of Mr. Cunningham looming tall in the obscurity to leeward of the galley, and had joined him for a talk of ten minutes or so; but my anxiety not to be implicated in any measures his love might suggest to him ren-

dered me very wary and brief in these approaches. One night indeed I found him so busily occupied in conversing with two or three sailors that he remained unconscious of my presence; he seemed to look towards me, yet went on addressing the men with energy, though in a very subdued voice; on which I strolled aft again, wondering what on earth he could find in a mere chat with two or three commonplace Jacks to so deeply engage and interest him. I never again offered to join him on deck.

From Miss Primrose I would regularly receive a faint smile or a slight bow when she arrived at meal-times, or if she ascended to the poop-deck when I was there; but these courtesies were absolutely without any further significance than to the general eye they were intended to express. I do not doubt that Mr. Cunningham had carefully advised her in his boat-hook-and-porthole-correspondence; that he had repeated my strongly-expressed wish that my name should not in any way be mixed up in his romantic undertaking; so that her cold and colourless deportment would be due to his

written admonitions. Yet so inconsistent is the mind that, whilst on the one hand I was sincerely rejoiced that she should favour me with as wide a berth as she gave the rest of us men, on the other my vanity was piqued by what I considered a sort of ingratitude in her. I would sometimes think that I merited something more than a bow that was only reclaimed from stiffness by its elegance: that, in short, some glow of feeling should illuminate the beautiful eyes she directed at me; that something of warmth, of cordiality, should colour the smile which she occasionally bestowed upon me. Yet it was very well as it was, as my good sense would note when I observed the manner in which I was watched by Burton and young Elphinstone and others of the young jokers who swelled our military company aft. I well knew, not by seeing only but by hearing also, that the news of "those lines Swift admires so much, you knaaw," having been copied by Miss Primrose and given to me, had gone the rounds; and many a thirsty glance did I detect if Miss Primrose came on deck when I was there, or on any other occasion of our exchanging a bow.

I was one morning smoking a cigar to leeward of the wheel, which I need hardly say—though to be sure this is the age of steamboats and "amidship steering-gear"—was fixed at the after end of the poop-deck, with nothing behind it and the taffrail save a wide spread of sand-white grating. It was a clear, brilliant morning, the sun soaring with a growing fierceness of sting in its bite; but the coolness of the fresh ocean breeze was in the violet shadow under the long stretch of snow-white awning. It was shortly after breakfast; a few people lounged here and there, but this part of the ship was comparatively deserted. From the main-deck resounded the sharply uttered orders of a non-commissioned officer drilling a number of the soldiers. The mate in charge of the ship paced a little space of the poop near the weather ladder.

I was gazing with admiration at the gleaming canvas of a vessel rendered toylike by distance when the companion-way suddenly framed the formidable countenance of Sir Charles Primrose. As he emerged, I expected to see his daughter behind him, instead of

which there appeared the grotesque figure of Captain Stagg. Without the pause of an instant as for reflection, the General accompanied by the little skipper marched right up to me.

"Good-morning," he exclaimed in his loud emphatic voice of command.

"Good-morning, sir," I answered.

"I should like a word with you, Captain Swift."

"With pleasure."

He cast a look at the man at the wheel who was close by. "Pray step a little this way," said he, and the three of us—and I saw that Stagg was to be of our party—moved to a vacant part of the deck. "I understand," began the General, standing in his towering, erect way and looking at me over his stiff high cravat, "that you share a cabin with a gentleman named Pellew?"

"Mr. George Pellew, Sir Charles," broke in Captain Stagg: "that's what he's down as in the Passengers' List."

"Now, sir," continued the General, "I want you to tell me if you have any reason to suppose that Pellew is *not*"—he thundered out

this word *not*—"your fellow-passenger's real name."

There was nothing for it but to equivocate. I deplored the obligation, but Mr. Cunningham had pledged me to secrecy, and my answer therefore must protect him.

"Is there any reason to doubt that his name is Pellew?" I exclaimed, addressing Captain Stagg.

"Sir Charles believes the gentleman to be somebody else," responded the skipper.

"I have reason to suspect that his name is Cunningham," exclaimed the General. "As his cabin-fellow, you will often have conversed with him, some remark will have excited your suspicion. You will have observed the initials on his linen, for instance."

"This really concerns you more than me, Captain Stagg," said I.

"If the safety of the ship isn't threatened by the gentleman's conduct, I can't possibly make it concern me that I can see," rejoined Captain Stagg. "As I have explained to Sir Charles, the master of a ship has got nothing to do with the *names* of his passengers. Have they paid

their fares? Do they conduct themselves properly? If the master of a ship is answered '*yes*' to the like of such questions, then," he added with an emphatic nod at me, "I don't see how he can interfere when it comes to the matter of the company of one passenger not being agreeable to the taste of another."

Sir Charles listened with a frown, keeping his eyes fastened with their habitual expression of fierceness upon the round face and distorted features of the skipper. He waited for him to cease, then addressed me.

"Captain Stagg has described your fellow-passenger. The description leaves me in no doubt. His name is Cunningham. Yet I wish to be perfectly satisfied. Will you describe him to me?"

"I don't know how better to put him before you, sir," said I, "than by saying that without exception he is the handsomest young fellow I ever saw in my life." The General made an angry gesture. "He is perfectly well-bred, he is rather taller than you, I should say, a magnificently built man—" I paused as though at a loss to say more.

"Why does not he show himself?" demanded the General.

"Did not he explain his motive to you, Captain?" said I.

"Oh yes," rumbled Stagg in a voice of ill-temper. "He said he wanted to keep himself to himself, had no taste for company, least of all for soldiers. His name may be Cunningham or his name may be Pellew for all I know; but unless you're certain of your man, Sir Charles, my own notion is he's a nobleman, some real Lord with a fine title, travelling for his entertainment, and wishful to remain unknown."

"Is that your opinion?" asked the General, turning upon me with dignity, though with a face full of irritability.

"Really, sir, he has not interested me so much as to cause me to speculate about him. I seldom visit my berth in the daytime, therefore we meet rarely; and at night he is commonly in bed and asleep when I go to my cabin. He is in the habit of coming on deck after dusk, and is usually I think to be found on the main-deck yonder. You may easily satisfy your

doubts, sir, by walking forward any night when he is on deck and looking at him."

He bent his gimlet-like eye upon me, and I seemed to feel it pierce my very conscience. Passion then mastered him, and he whipped round in a very undignified manner upon Stagg.

"I must insist, sir," he cried, "upon your ascertaining who the person is who lies skulking in his cabin below."

"What am I to do?" cried Captain Stagg. "The road to his cabin's all plain sailing, Sir Charles. Why not call upon him yourself?"

"Sir," thundered the General, heedless of the presence of the people on the deck, who, though they feigned not to look, were listening to every word he said, "you are commander of this ship and responsible for her safety. There is a man skulking below. Who is he? You do not know. Sir, it is your duty to know. I have a right to demand in my own name and in that of my fellow-passengers," and here he swept the deck with his eyes, "that you produce this secret person, who, for all you can tell us to the contrary, may be an escaped felon—a—a—murderer, sir, — an — an — incendiary, sir," he

continued, stammering with temper, "a fellow whose design may be to make a hole in your

"'I MUST INSIST, SIR,' HE CRIED, 'UPON YOUR ASCERTAINING WHO THE PERSON IS WHO LIES SKULKING IN HIS CABIN BELOW.'"

ship and sink her for some purpose of horrible revenge. You tell me you cannot interfere

with him?" He directed his fiery eye at a group of soldiers who were watching us on the forecastle; but whatever suggestion came to him from *them* was quickly dismissed as a notion too preposterous even for his illogical and groping mood of wrath to entertain. "Send a company of sailors in command of one of your officers to his cabin, and if he still declines to come on deck, have him dragged up."

"Sir," exclaimed Stagg warmly, his face all awork with the conflict of sensations excited by the General's fierceness, by his own struggles to maintain an air of respectfulness, by his disgust at being thus shouted at in the hearing of the passengers and the man at the wheel, "I know my duty as commander of this ship, and I know, sir, that that duty don't include the dragging of gentlemen, who have paid their passage-money, out of their cabins by a company of sailors in charge of a mate. There are soldiers aboard, sir, and you're a General; and if you like to take it upon yourself to order a file of them red-coats to bring Mr. Pellew on deck against his will, why, Sir Charles,

you may do it if you like; but if Mr. Pellew comes to me and makes a grievance of the force displayed, then my duty will be to protect him as a passenger and to request the officer in command of those troops to clap the fellows who went below in irons so as to keep them out of mischief for the future. And if the officer refused to do it, *I* should have to do it."

The General without a word marched to the companion-hatch, and went below.

"Did any man ever hear the like of such a thing?" cried Stagg, talking loudly with a mingled air of consternation and passion, and intending his words as much for the ears of the others on the poop as for mine, "that a high-bred gentleman like Sir Charles should dictate to me aboard my own ship—a soldier, too, ignorant of nautical duties!—that because he's got some notion the gentleman isn't the gentleman he calls himself, *I'm* to send some of my sailors below to have him dragged up as if—as if—"

But my identification with this curious business was already much too marked for my

taste as it was, so I left him to splutter out the rest of his incensed mind to the people at whom he was looking, and stepped below on to the quarter-deck.

Such exaggeration of resentment, such public and undignified disclosure of excessive temper, could only signify that the General had plumbed the mystery of Mr. "Pellew," and that the suspicion amounting to detection had set his heart on fire and his brain at its wits' ends. What was now to do? Would he lock his daughter up? No—he *dared* not venture that. The knowledge that she was imprisoned by him would determine the passengers to render his life a burthen, and *that*, let me assure you, spite of his distinguished military position and forbidding countenance, they would one and all have been very easily able to contrive through the ceaseless and countless opportunities of shipboard association.

It soon got wind that he had been in a passion on the poop, and the reason of it, as a piece of news in going from mouth to mouth, was laughably exaggerated. In fact, a young officer came to me, and asked me with a grave face to

settle the matter, as it involved a bet of a couple of guineas.

"Was it not you, Swift, and not the queer chap who shares your berth, whom the General quarrelled with for falling in love with his daughter?"

This same young fellow, however, gave me one item of intelligence: that Miss Primrose was no longer to sleep alone.

"Who is to be her companion, do you know?"

"Her maid," said he. "I met a couple of stewards lugging a mattress up from below, and asked them what was the matter, and they told me it was Miss Primrose's maid's bedding, and that the woman was going to sleep with her mistress for the future. Next thing'll be a sentry with a loaded musket outside her door, I suppose."

All this time the weather was wonderfully fine, the breeze strong and steady on the quarter, and the ship averaging some two hundred and eighty miles in the twenty-four hours. I went to rest late on this night of the day on which Sir Charles had questioned me. A game of chess, of which I was, and still am, a

great lover, had detained me at the saloon table beyond my usual hour; we, however, who occupied the after-part of the ship were much indulged; the lamps, for instance, were never extinguished until the last of us had withdrawn; and up to the hour of midnight the steward was permitted to serve us with refreshments. But midnight was the limit; after that hour the ship floated on the calm sea or fled through the windy night in darkness, and the pop and gush of the soda-water bottle ceased, unless, perhaps, down in my obscure part of the ship a dim explosion gave the listeners to know that one of the "afficers" was making himself happy with a secret if not a final "nightcap."

It was some little time before twelve o'clock when I got to my cabin; but Mr. Cunningham was not in his bunk. I concluded that he was still haunting that black part of the deck which was to leeward of the galley, and undressed myself. The atmosphere was hot despite the open porthole—the cabin, indeed, being to leeward; nor though the ear found the sound grateful, was there any refresh-

ment for the flesh in the cool, fountain-like seething of the foam expiring along the ship's side, or twisting into an arrow-like wake of snow. I put my face into the porthole to cool my heated cheeks, and on a sudden caught a noise as of the shuffling of feet upon the channel or platform outside. I supposed that some sailor had jumped into the chains to clear away a rope. Still, the prolonged absence of Mr. Cunningham rendering me suspicious in a vague sort of way, I continued to listen, scarce knowing what next I might hear; but if ever any sound again came from the mizzen-channel, it was whelmed by the hiss of the rushing brine.

In about twenty minutes' time the door opened and Mr. Cunningham stepped in, draped as usual in his immense coat and slouched brigandlike hat. He flung the weighty garment from him with an air of loathing as though half dead with the heat, and observing me to be awake, he exclaimed, whilst he flourished a handkerchief over his face:

"Such a masquerade becomes unbearable in a dog-day atmosphere of this sort."

"You appear to have been exerting yourself," said I.

"And so I have," he answered; "I have been risking my life indeed."

He produced a bottle of champagne from a chest of drawers, and after offering me a draught of it, swallowed a tumblerful of the wine.

"I was within an ace of going overboard," said he, applying his handkerchief to his moustache, and sinking into his Madeira chair. "I must not again attempt such a feat in that infernal cloak."

"What have you been doing?"

"I received no letter to-day, and wished to know the reason of Miss Primrose's silence, so I got into what I think you call the main-chains, where the rigging comes together thickly, and where the shadow is so deep that I defy any one who is not keeping a bright lookout on the poop to observe a figure cautiously creeping over the side. I wished to make my way to that platform," said he, pointing with his thumb in the direction of the mizzen-channel, "and I succeeded in doing so,

"'FORTUNATELY, MY HEIGHT ENABLED ME TO KEEP A GOOD HOLD OF THE RAIL, BUT THAT CONFOUNDED CLOAK WAS AS THOUGH I WERE CARRYING SEVERAL MEN ON MY BACK.'"

though I can't conceive now how I managed it, for the beading along the side—do you call it beading? but no matter—did not certainly project an inch, and I could find no other support for my toes. Fortunately, my height enabled me to keep a good hold of the rail, but that confounded cloak was as though I were carrying several men on my back."

"You might very easily have gone overboard," said I.

"I very nearly *did* go overboard," he replied; "I believe I shall not make a second attempt of the same sort," said he, laughing softly, and toying with his cigar-case as though debating whether he should light a cheroot or not.

"Then it must have been you that I heard just now?" said I.

"Quite likely," he answered coolly.

"I suppose you now know," said I, "that Miss Primrose's maid shares her berth with her?"

"Yes, I now know that. Still my adventure was perfectly successful. Miss Primrose, you see, sleeps as you do on the top shelf, and her maid lies in the under bunk. A whispered

conversation blends harmoniously with the hiss of the foam. And then we had reason to suppose that the maid was asleep."

He now lighted a cheroot and sat gazing at me thoughtfully.

"Have you heard," said I, "that the General questioned me somewhat passionately about you this morning?"

"No. Who is to give me the news but you? My time outside just now was all too brief to obtain information of that sort."

"He questioned me very angrily; as good as ordered the commander of the ship to send a number of sailors here to hoist you on deck. He knows who you are. He called you Cunningham. His putting the maid to sleep with her mistress proves his detection of the truth."

"I hope he was not very rude to you?" he exclaimed, unemotionally, with a demeanour of coolness indeed that astonished me, as I had reasonably imagined that the news would surprise or irritate or alarm him.

"His temper rendered his speech objectionable," said I. "Now that he knows you are

on board, I presume you will show yourself on deck?"

"I believe not," he replied. "I am very comfortable here—as snug and lonely as a maggot in its nut. The General would not suffer Miss Primrose and me to be together. I must therefore keep away from the poop, or endure the misery of fearing that her health suffered from confinement to her cabin—for her father would certainly insist upon her remaining below. Besides, if I now went amongst you, nothing would follow but the discomfort of being stared at. After to-day all the passengers will be as busy with talk as a rookery."

"Though the General," said I, "humanely suggested that you should be dragged on to the deck, I am bound to say on behalf of Captain Stagg, whom we both dislike, that he spoke up very spunkily, told Sir Charles—" and here I gave him the substance of what the skipper had said.

"I am not to be dragged out of this cabin," said he, smiling. "For any sort of violence done me in that way Captain Stagg would have to pay handsomely in a court of justice, and

he knows it. I take it," said he, stroking down his moustache and admiring the ash of his cigar, "that the law of the land is extended to the ocean. I have paid for this cabin, or for a share of it. My portion is as much mine to hold and enjoy as if it were a lodging hired by the week or month ashore. There is no imaginable excuse that Captain Stagg could invent for having me dragged out of it. In fact, I should like to reason the matter with him; and if to-morrow you will ask him to step down and look in upon me, I shall feel obliged."

Our conversation continued in this strain for some time. I could gather no hint from him as to his intentions. He certainly did not appear in the least degree disconcerted by the General's discovery of his being in the ship—for as you have seen, Sir Charles's suspicion practically amounted to discovery; and yet it seemed to me that the one effect of this detection must be to render his prospects as a lover entirely hopeless: for now the General's existence would be one of impassioned vigilance. Whilst the three of them kept the sea, there

would indeed be the safety of the illimitable horizon; there were no post-chaises, no railway stations over the side; and the General would be sensible of the security provided to his wishes by a full-rigged sailing-ship in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. But when the three of them reached India! Then it would be that Sir Charles, knowing Mr. Cunningham to be at Miss Primrose's heels, would go to work to wither and extinguish my cabin-fellow's hopes. What he *would* do who could conjecture? What he *could* do is not hard to suppose. He was a man of passions which were to be easily inflamed into the exercise of a tyranny that should be nothing short of brutal; and hence I could not but think that now Mr. Cunningham was known to be on board, the sooner he relinquished his pursuit of Miss Primrose, the more promptly he should request Captain Stagg to transfer him to the first homeward-bound ship the *Light of Asia* might fall in with, the saner he would prove himself.

A few days passed. I will not detain you with an account of the small talk of those

hours, nor with a description of what I took notice of in the behaviour, severally, of the General, of his daughter, and of Mr. Cunningham, who was suffered to remain unmolested below. But this much I may set down: that though we were all of us aware that Miss Primrose was under no restraint, and that though in the daytime her father kept his eye upon her, whilst at night she was watched only by her maid,—if indeed the mere sleeping of the woman in Miss Primrose's berth could be interpreted into any sort of sentinelling,—we did not fail to notice that the girl was slowly withdrawing herself from the society of the saloon and the deck. Most of her meals were taken to her cabin, where she was waited upon by her maid. This we knew to be of her own ordering, because again and again Sir Charles, finding her absent from her place when he took his seat, would go to her berth and return with a face dark with mortification and annoyance. Also she seldom visited the deck. Me she now scarcely noticed. Interpreted by what followed, I later recognized what was almost incivility in her as a maiden's strategy, but at the time

her cold and withholding demeanour vexed me as an expression of ingratitude, and perhaps in

"ME SHE NOW SCARCELY NOTICED."

a small degree it removed my sympathy from her.

VII

"IN THE MIDDLE WATCH"

By the date at which this story has now arrived we had been a day less than a month out from the Thames; but the equator was still under our bow. Indeed I have some recollection of our latitude at noon on this day being 40′ or 45′ north. Throughout the morning and throughout the afternoon the burnished heave of the sea was faintly tarnished by catspaws only, delicate breathings of air that rapidly expired in their sportive flights, leaving our lofty canvas sulkily and breathlessly swaying as the tall fabric lightly rolled on the light wide blue undulations.

Yet the heat was not so excessive as we had found it further north. The pitch no longer lay soft as putty in the seams of the deck, and

the vision could penetrate to the sea-line without being sickened by the serpentine waving of it in the dim blue haze which rose in steam from the smoking rail and sides of the ship, and which everywhere created an atmosphere that caused whatever the eye rested on to revolve; so that the long jibbooms and the very mastheads of the vessel seemed to twist round and round as though they were Archimedean screws slowly worked.

The moon rose very late and it was a dark but clear night when I left the deck to kill half-an-hour in the saloon over a glass of cold grog, and in a chat with such men as I might find there. On entering my cabin at half-past ten or thereabouts I found Mr. Cunningham in bed. He lay with his face to the ship's side, but his regular breathing assured me that he was sleeping. The cabin porthole was wide open, but not a breath of air seemed to penetrate the aperture. There was something almost oppressive in the strange hush outside. At intervals one heard a sob of water or a dim plash and a weak noise of gurgling that made one think of a person drowning alongside.

The light swaying of the ship was illustrated by the slow small slide of the stars in the velvet disc of the porthole. Now and then I would be sensible of a light jar or shock as from the "kick" of the wheel as it is called.

I got into bed after extinguishing the bracket-lamp, and lay perhaps for half-an-hour or so wide awake, *listening*, as an Irishman might say, to the deep impressive stillness upon the ocean and wondering how long this sort of weather was going to last, and at what date we might expect to enter the river Hooghley.

I was awakened by something that irritated my face, and putting my hand into a bag at the end of my bunk I pulled out a box of lucifers, struck a light, and discovered that my visitor was a cockroach. The match swiftly burned out, and suspecting that there might be others of the disgusting creatures crawling upon my bedclothes, I hopped from my bunk and lighted the lamp. As I did this a sound floating in through the porthole caught my ear. I listened. The noise had resembled the dip of an oar; but I might be quite sure it could be

nothing of the sort; nothing more than some instant murmur of water alongside, some note of eddying resembling the stroke of an oar.

I examined my bed and had the satisfaction of observing a short line of cockroaches crawling in good processional order off the sheet under which I had lain: they made for the side of the bunk to the interstice in which they lodged in the day. The matter was trifling, yet the disgust the sight of the noisome pests excited rendered me in a moment very broad awake. I glanced at Mr. Cunningham's bunk: it was empty. His clothes were removed from the pegs on which he commonly hung them. I looked to see if there were any cockroaches in his bed, conceiving that he might have been driven by the vermin on to the deck. No: his bed was free of cockroaches.

I had not found it excessively hot when I first came below; but now, whether because of the cockroaches or because of the glow of the freshly-kindled lamp, or, which was no doubt the case, because whilst I slept there had happened a sensible increase in the temperature, I found the atmosphere overpowering. "Mr.

Cunningham is on deck," thought I, "I'll join him." Indeed, I seemed to pant for the wide freshness of the ocean night, for the dew of it, and the ice-like brilliancy of the stars, and for the sweet draughts of air which came and went as the folds of the canvas swung large and pallid over the glimmering decks.

I partially clothed myself, thrust my naked feet into a pair of slippers, clapped a light straw hat on my head, and put a cigar into my pocket, and turning down the lamp, went out softly with that regard for the sleep of others which operates as a sort of instinct in one on board ship. I groped my way to the foot of the stairs which led to the saloon. This interior was in darkness, but the starlight touched the windows which overlooked the quarter-deck, and it lay in a faint sheen upon the sky-lights, and I passed very easily out through the door. Had the ship been deserted the decks could not have been stiller. There was no moon to make a reflection, and nothing visible stirred. I thought to hear the dull hum of voices, and went a little way forward, expecting to behold the shadowy outline of Mr. Cunning-

ham's tall figure. A couple of sailors seated Lascar fashion against the galley were snoring at the top of their pipes. Others I might, no doubt, have found coiled away in secret nooks ready to spring to their feet to the first sharp summons from the poop, for on such a breathless night as this was, with a cloudless heaven of stars going from sea-line to sea-line, the watch on deck were to be excused for napping.

I turned to look aft, and was somewhat surprised to find nobody in motion upon the poop; for *there* at least one thought to find that ceaseless vigilance which is and indeed must be the pulse, the marrow, the seminal principle of the vocation of the sea. Mounting the ladder on the port side of the ship, I made a few steps aft, still without catching sight of the officer of the watch, though the figure of the man at the wheel grasping the spokes at the extremity of the deck was to be seen rising and falling against the stars over the taffrail. Then my eye going to the huddle of thick ropes—shrouds and backstays complicated by the interlacing of ratlines—which formed the support of the mainmast, and which descended a little way

abaft the point at which the forward end of the poop terminated, I spied the motionless figure of a man.

"That will be the mate who has charge of the deck," thought I, and crossed over to him. He stood stirless as though blasted by lightning. I was struck by his posture.

"Is that you, Mr. Masters?" I inquired.

He returned no answer. For the moment I believed him lifeless; but even as I so thought I seemed to observe a sort of wriggle in the whole man, and now drawing close to him and peering narrowly, I was astounded to find him not only gagged but helplessly bound by turn upon turn of rope, and securely fastened to the rail of the deck!

I immediately went to work to liberate him. No fly involved by a spider in its web was ever more hopelessly imprisoned than was this second mate. Fathom after fathom of rope had gone to the securing of him, and it was like unreeling cotton to remove the innumerable turns that swathed him from his neck to his heels. The manner in which he had been gagged too, showed the hand of an artist. The

"I WAS ASTOUNDED TO FIND HIM NOT ONLY GAGGED BUT HELPLESSLY BOUND."

contrivance was so framed as to sit clear of his nostrils, yet to fill his mouth and paralyze the motion of his tongue. He leaned against the rail for some minutes speechless after I had released him, and guessing his condition, I bawled over the edge of the poop for some men to come to me, and three or four seamen approached, hurrying out of the darkness forward.

I swiftly explained the state in which I had found the second mate, and bade them chafe his limbs: which they forthwith did, understanding me with the prompt intelligence of sailors, yet marvelling greatly as they rubbed, as I might know by their manner of staring around.

"I am all right now, men, I am all right now," exclaimed Mr. Masters, and he made as though he would break from them, but staggered and leaned afresh against the rail with a manner of exhaustion, and feebly cried to me, "Will you call the captain, sir? I am not able to walk yet."

I hastened below into the saloon, too astonished, and I may say alarmed, to use my eyes as I ran; for let me tell you, it was no small shock

to one like myself, a passenger, to come on deck in the blackness of the night and find the officer of the watch, to whose keeping were entrusted the lives of all on board the ship, inhumanly bound and gagged, stirless and helpless and voiceless, and nothing at hand to explain the why and the how and the wherefore of the wild piece of business. I knocked smartly on the door of the captain's cabin, and before I could repeat the summons the handle was turned, and the figure of the square little man appeared.

"What is it? What is it?" The dim light that burnt in his cabin scarcely revealed me to him as he stood staring.

"Something is wrong on deck, Captain Stagg. I found your second mate gagged and bound to the rail, and have only just released him. He asked me to call you."

He waited to hear no more, but with a strange, half-smothered exclamation that sounded like the growl of a dreaming mastiff, he made a plunge for his small-clothes and was immediately following me on deck, struggling into his coat as he ran. The second mate leaned against

the rail where I had left him; the little knot of men lingered near, but they had ceased to chafe his limbs.

"What is it?" cried Stagg, marching in an impetuous deep-sea roll up to him, and speaking in a voice harsh, almost brutal with excitement, expectation, and temper.

"This was it, sir," answered the second mate in weak tones: "Five bells had just gone when Mr. Pellew, the tall gentleman that shares Captain Swift's cabin, came on to the poop. He stepped up to me, and we got into conversation. Presently he asked me if some shadow that he pretended to see out upon the water was a ship, and whilst I was leaning over the rail to look, I was gagged, half-throttled, and thrown on my back. There were three of them in the job. Mr. Pellew was one. His strength was like a giant's. The others were two of our men, but it was too dark to make them out. They bound me from head to foot, and then set me up against the rail here, and I was just able to notice—for the suddenness of the attack had taken half my mind out of my head—that they went to the after port quarter-boat and lowered

her, but all so quietly that I shouldn't have known what they were about if I hadn't had a sight of their figures as they worked. I can tell you no more, sir, nor do I know how long ago it is since it happened," he added in a voice that expressed the bewilderment of his poor wits.

Captain Stagg listened; there was a pause; I believe that rage and amazement had for a few moments deprived him of the power of utterance, but he now let fly with the hurricane note of a bull.

"Call all hands! Turn up all hands! Where's the bo'sun? Lively now! My boat gone!" He rushed to the davits at which the boat had hung, I following. True enough, the black irons curved naked to the stars with the tackles (by which the boat was hoisted and lowered) overhauled and hanging down to the water's edge. The night was still very dark, though clear and richly spangled with stars; but the tardy moon would be rising shortly, and even as I swept with my sight the ebony rim of the sea, clear cut against the fainter dusk of the sky and the low wheeling lumi-

naries, I thought I could discern the weak lunar dawn in the east, a dim reddish suffusion in that quarter. There was not a breath of air, and the ship floated upon a surface of oil. Even as the captain stood looking over the side, his hard breathing sounding like the panting of a wounded man, the shrill alarum of the boatswain's whistle pierced the silence, followed by the tempestuous roar of "All hands."

At the wheel stood a motionless figure gripping the spokes. The captain rounded upon him.

"How long is it," he shouted, "since this boat was stolen?"

"'Bout half-an-hour, sir," answered the man slowly and sullenly.

"Were you at the wheel when she was lowered?"

"Yes," answered the man in the same sullen note.

"And were you at the wheel," roared the captain, "when the second officer was secured and gagged?"

"Yes," responded the fellow.

"And you stood there looking on—made no sign—didn't call for help! Mutiny, mutiny!" thundered Captain Stagg; and he rolled forward, shouting alternately "Mutiny! Where's the bo'sun? Mutiny, I say! Send the bo'sun here."

"Here I am, sir," shouted a voice on the quarter-deck.

"Aft with you with a couple of men and seize that man at the wheel and clap him in irons until I can attend to him," cried the captain. "Where are the midshipmen of the watch?"

A boy's voice responded.

"Muster all hands. See who it is that's missing."

And now began a scene of excitement, of hurry, of disorder, which my pen is almost powerless to do justice to. To the shrill notes of the boatswain's pipe and to the cries which accompanied it, the soldiers had come tumbling up from their quarters, and the decks were full of people, who got into one another's way, and who called questions one to another in alarmed voices, with the squeaky voices of midshipmen

threading the hubbub, whilst the shouts of the captain swept past the ear like blasts from a blunderbuss. Had an alarm of fire been raised, had a whole gale of wind suddenly swept down upon the ship, had some submarine convulsion happened under her and started a butt-end and set her leaking,—in short, had there occurred any tremendous incident or tragic disaster such as it is the business and the habit of a seaman to expect and encounter, I believe Captain Stagg—cordially as I disliked the fellow—would have been a man to meet it coolly; his orders would have been given with composure, and there would have been discipline and calmness in the ship. But the piratic seizure of one of his boats—the absconding of two of his sailors—the clear confederacy of the fellow who had been at the helm—above all, the enormous indignity, the cruel treatment to which his second officer had been subjected—here were conditions of this midnight business to drive him mad; and literally mad he seemed to be as he ran about bellowing here and there, roaring to the boatswain to tell him who were the missing men, to the chief mate to

ascertain if the boat was in sight, and so on.

The confusion was in a very little while prodigiously heightened by the arrival of most of the passengers, who came in an elbowing, half-dressed throng through the companion-way, most of them—ladies and gentlemen—calling out to know what had happened before they had fairly thrust their noses through the hatch. Colonel Mowbray spying me as I stood near the davits at which the stolen boat had hung, rushed to me to learn what was wrong with the ship. The scene at this instant is not to be described. Amid the darkness that almost blotted out the fore-part of the vessel I could perceive the half-clad figures of the passengers coming together in groups, dissolving, and then re-forming as they sped about the decks, questioning one another, and hunting for the captain, for the mates, for anybody able to answer their enquiries. I was telling Colonel Mowbray what had happened, when General Primrose's hard commanding voice echoed in the companion-way; his tall soldierly figure emerged, and he immediately began to cry out:

"Is Miss Primrose here on deck? Has any one seen Miss Primrose? She is not in her cabin and she is not in the saloon;" and by the starlight I saw him raise his hand to the side of his mouth the better to direct his short, passionate, almost despairful cry of "Geraldine! Geraldine! Are you here?"

"By heaven! then," cried I to the Colonel as the truth rushed in upon my brain in a manner to stagger my wits, "I see it all now! It is an elopement! My cabin-fellow and Miss Primrose have run away—they have stolen this boat here and are out somewhere upon that black sea. What madness! Sheer suicide! And how on earth are they to be recovered?"

The Colonel could only utter short ejaculations of astonishment, and then fled with the news to his wife and to anybody else whom he could get to listen to it.

All the people had congregated on the forepart of the poop where the captain was, and twenty of them seemed talking at once, so great was the hubbub. The General's voice rose strong; and equally strong were the ocean accents of Captain Stagg. I stood alone—no

one near me save the helmsman, and with the utmost effort of my vision I swept the great plain of liquid dusk stretching with the vagueness of a midnight thunder-cloud to its star-determined horizon: but there was nothing to be seen, no glint of phosphorus to indicate the dip of an oar, no minute, ink-like spot in the vapourish obscurity to signify the boat. "What madness!" I repeated again and again to myself, "what extravagance of delirious resolution! Unless we pick them up what will be their fate?"

I moved towards the crowd at the break of the poop to hear what was being said. The moon was then rising; a distorted shape of dull red light; weak, lean, and lonely in the immeasurable distance; and the cold, wide universe of starry solitude in whose heart our ship lay motionless grew colder and wider to every sense in one through the sheer contrasting effect of the confused notes of talk echoing along the vessel's decks. But by this time it had been guessed, it was now known, that the gentleman who had shared my cabin had eloped from the ship with Miss Primrose in

the stolen quarter-boat in company with two sailors. The crew had been mustered and all hands had answered saving the absent men. Some one shouted out my name, and a few steps carried me into the crowd—for a crowd we formed.

"I am here," I exclaimed.

The General and Captain Stagg came thrusting to where I stood.

"What can you tell me about my daughter, Captain Swift?" shouted Sir Charles.

"Nothing, sir," I answered. "The man who called himself Pellew was asleep when I went to my cabin. When I awoke three-quarters of an hour ago his bunk was empty. I came on deck to breathe the air, imagining nothing, suspecting nothing, on my word of honour as a gentleman and an officer, and found the second mate gagged and tied to the rail."

There was sincerity in my voice and my words carried conviction. No need to see my face to guess how thoroughly shocked and startled I was.

"Do you mean to tell me, sir," roared the captain, "that you, sleeping in the same cabin

with the rascal who has stolen my boat, had no notion of what was going forward?"

Maddened by this coarsely-delivered, most brutally affronting suspicion, I approached him by a single stride, and looking down at his face where it palely glimmered betwixt his square shoulders, I said between my teeth:

"Captain Stagg, if you repeat that question I will flog you round the deck with the first piece of rope that I can get hold of;" and unconsciously I lifted my hands in readiness to take him by the throat had he opened his lips.

He fell back a step, dismayed, confounded, utterly at a loss. The dead silence that had settled down upon us was broken by several strong expressions of sympathy with me from Burton, Elphinstone, and one or two others, and some one said loudly, "By Ged then, it wasn't to be borne." But though all this takes some time to describe, it had begun, it had ended, in the space of a few ticks of a clock. Anything that Stagg may have made up his mind to say or do as a reply to me was arrested or extinguished by Sir Charles crying out: "What start have they had?"

"Something within half-an-hour, sir," answered the still enfeebled voice of the second mate from the other side of the crowd.

"They are to be pursued and taken," cried the General. "Let the boats be lowered at once: there are three, and they can steer in three separate directions. Colonel Mowbray, a non-commissioned officer, and three men with loaded muskets will go in each boat in case resistance should be offered. Let this be done now quickly."

"There's no good in sending boats after what's not to be seen, Sir Charles," exclaimed Captain Stagg in a growling stubborn voice. "Mr. Freeman," he shouted, pretty sure that the chief mate would be within hearing of him, "get lanterns lighted and hung over the side, that the men who've run away with my boat may know where the ship lies in case they change their minds and wish to return."

"We are wasting valuable time," cried the General passionately; "I demand that you order the boats to be lowered, sir. My daughter must be recovered—my daughter must be recovered!" he repeated; and the plaintiveness

that his advanced years, his grief, his sense of disgrace, put into the cry rendered it affecting beyond expression.

"Sir Charles, there's no good to come of lowering the boats," exclaimed Stagg; "look how dark it is! The moon don't give any light. There's nothing to see. In what direction are the coxswains to steer then? The runaways pull three oars, and if the lady chooses to row there'll be four. That's one less than the other boats can pull; and then see what a start they've had."

"I don't care about that, sir," roared the General. "What! You tell me you mean to keep the boats idly hanging at the ends of those irons whilst my daughter is still within reach there—or there—or there!" he added, wildly pointing to port, and then to starboard, and then over the stern. "You tell me there is nothing to be done when we have soldiers and sailors willing to give chase—when the sea is as smooth as a pond—when each boat can hold a crew strong enough to frequently relieve each other at the oars, and when the male fugitives count but two seamen and a person who

is not a sailor, and unable perhaps to row. My God!" he cried, violently stamping his foot, "what precious time we are wasting."

"Sir Charles," I exclaimed, "if the captain will lower a boat I will volunteer for her to serve in any capacity in which I may be useful. Amongst us officers we should easily muster a crew, and I will guarantee that we capture the runaways if we only get a sight of them."

"I thank you, Captain Swift," said the General.

"Who will join me?" I shouted.

There was a chorus of "I will, I will, I will."

"No man touches my boats without my leave," bawled Captain Stagg; "one's as good as lost, and the seeking of her may lose me another. Gentlemen, all, only consider for yourselves. Land's sake, gents, cast your eyes over the rail and ask yourselves where you're agoing to steer, and how far you mean to row, and what'll be your chance of recovering this ship if you should lose sight of her, and drift too distant for lamps and rockets to catch your eye?"

"But what is to be done?" said the General. "Is it to be endured that my daughter shall be

suffered to remain in an open boat all night, with the chance of perishing if stormy weather follows, when she may still be within reach? They may have put off without provisions or water, and what are to be her sufferings if they are not followed and recovered?"

"What can I do, sir?" answered Stagg in a note of mingled shouting and groaning. "I can't make the wind to blow; and without wind this ship won't move: and if she could be made to move, into what quarter of the horizon am I to follow the boat? Let a breeze come along and I shall know what to do. You don't suppose—the gentlemen don't suppose—that I'm going to lose a boat and two men for the want of looking for them. It'll be day-break within three hours of the time they started; and in three hours how far will they have got? Shall we call it twelve mile? Twelve mile off is to be seen from our mast-head, and so I tell ye, Sir Charles; and you leave me alone to have a bright look-out at the masthead all ready for the sun to rise. But to send the other three boats in chase! And in chase of what? Something that isn't to be

seen! That would be a lubberly trick. Doubt me, and I'll call all hands aft, and you shall hear what my mates and crew have to say to it; all of them sailor men—not soldiers!" he wiped his face and went to the rail to spit.

"I am afraid—I'm afraid there is but too much truth in what he says," exclaimed Colonel Mowbray, uttering the words timidly.

The General in silence stood towering amongst us—motionless, gazing in the direction of the little trickle of reddish wake that floated under the moon on the flawless indigo of the sea.

"The boat ought certainly to be pursued," said a subaltern with a lisp.

"*I'm* quite willing to do anything," said another.

"Three boats," said I, "should provide three chances to one; yet there is this to be said—should a breeze spring up, one or another of the boats might stand to lose the ship."

"The boat is sure to be in sight at dawn," exclaimed Colonel Mowbray.

The General walked right aft and stood alone there, near the wheel, gazing seawards.

VIII

CONCLUSION

THE passengers now began to melt away, not to return to their beds, but to clothe themselves. The captain came from the rail and approached me close, then wheeled off on seeing who I was. Lanterns sparkled in the fore and mizzen rigging, and in their faint illumination the figures of soldiers and sailors on the main-deck and in the waist came and went. The mate with a night-glass at his eye incessantly searched the horizon, crossing from side to side to do so. The calm was absolutely breathless—a clock calm it is called at sea: not the faintest stir in the atmosphere, though a faint long-drawn swell, the systole and diastole of old ocean's sleeping heart, delicately swayed the buttons of our trucks under the sparkling

stars whose brilliance found no eclipse in the wan light of the moon.

Suddenly there was the explosion of a rocket with a long shearing hiss of it as it shot betwixt our masts and broke into a little cloud of light on high. This was the first of half-a-dozen that followed in rapid succession. Evidently Stagg's forlorn hope was that the two absconded sailors would be alarmed by reflection into a change of mind and row the pair of lovers back again to the ship. Nothing, however, to my fancy, to my recollection of Mr. Cunningham's determined character, to every thought of the devotion of the girl who had embarked on this most unheard-of, this most astonishing adventure, could seem more improbable. In strength Mr. Cunningham was a match for any two men; in a passion he might prove himself the equal of even three, and should the two sailors desire to return, it would assuredly go hard with them if they attempted to give effect to their resolution.

The General continued to stand alone near the wheel. No one offered to approach him. I can see with my mind's eye at this moment

his stately military figure, stirless as a statue saving a slow motion of his head as he gazed round upon the sea. I felt a hearty disgust of myself when I reflected upon the part I had taken in Mr. Cunningham's love affair. Never did I regret anything so much as my having served him and Miss Primrose as a messenger. The General was a man whose character and qualities were little to my taste; yet I own that it affected me deeply to witness him standing alone at the extremity of the deck searching with his eyes the cold black surface of the waters—to recall his professional distinction—to remember his achievements—to reflect upon the valour, the judgment, the loyalty that had gone to the creation of his long career; and *then* to think of the shame and sorrow that had come upon him.

Indeed there was something so extraordinarily audacious in the act of the lovers, that though the empty davits yawned before me, though the lanterns still shone over the ship's side, though there were eyes at many parts of the rails and bulwarks on the look-out, I could scarcely yet credit the occurrence as an actu-

ality. Who in all one's life had ever heard of such a thing as a young fellow eloping with a girl out of a ship in an open boat and taking his chance with his sweetheart at his side in the lonely heart of a thousand leagues of Atlantic water? I might suppose that he had heavily bribed the seamen who accompanied him. One could easily understand the scheme now: a programme that involved three sailors, one of whom should be at the helm by the rotation of the "tricks" on the night agreed upon for the carrying out of the plot. Had they victualled and watered the boat before going away in her? If so, this must have been secretly and darkly done on the previous nights: though how it had been accomplished without detection I cannot imagine. But what amazed me most was the subtle stillness, the sneaking breathless artfulness they had exhibited in lowering the boat, getting the girl into her, unhooking the blocks of the tackles and shoving off without a soul on board saving the fellow at the wheel, and the gagged and helpless second mate, hearing anything or having the least suspicion of what was go-

ing forward. To be sure I had seemed to hear the distant dip of a solitary oar, and I might now be certain that the noise had been no fancy of mine. But was it possible that the boat was lowered so quietly as to be unheard by the rows of sleepers on that side of the ship, all whose portholes would be wide open on so sultry a night?

But so it was: the boat was gone; the young couple were missing; two of the sailors had not answered to their names, and yonder stood the father, motionlessly gazing with God knows what passions and griefs surging in him, his tall figure blotting out a score or two of stars twinkling dimly in the distant dusk.

I was but partially clothed, as you know, and made my way below to complete my toilet in readiness for daylight when it should come. In passing through the saloon, I perceived the figure of a woman seated at the table with her face buried in her hands. She was sobbing bitterly. A couple of the lamps had been lighted and there was plenty of illumination to see by, but the interior was empty of all save that weeping form. I paused when abreast of

her, and wondering who she was and therefore unable to imagine the cause of her distress, I asked gently if I could be of use to her. She lifted her head. She was Miss Primrose's maid.

"There is no reason for all this unhappiness," said I; "the sea is delightfully calm, the weather delightfully fine, and your mistress will be restored to the ship, I hope and believe, during the morning."

"Oh, but Sir Charles will think me an accomplice, sir," she exclaimed in a broken voice.

"If you have the truth on your side you will be easily able to convince him," said I.

"I can assure you, sir, I had no notion that my young lady meant to take so mad a step," she exclaimed, talking eagerly as though glad of an opportunity to disburthen her mind. "I sleep very soundly, and that's where it is, sir. When I went to bed my young lady was undressed and sleeping as I believed. She had not dined at the table. She asked for some sandwiches and wine at eight, and then told me to go on deck and take the air, and to return at half past nine to help her to undress, but some

time before that hour I returned to the cabin to fetch a shawl to protect me from the dew, and when I entered I found Miss Primrose with her arm in the porthole. I thought

"'OH, BUT SIR CHARLES WILL THINK ME AN ACCOMPLICE, SIR,' SHE EXCLAIMED IN A BROKEN VOICE."

nothing of it, but now since I've heard that the gentleman slept in the cabin underneath us, I believe she was communicating with him through that window, though I do not know how she did it. When I came back at half

past nine I found she had undressed herself and was then getting into bed, and at ten o'clock, sir, as I have said, she seemed to be asleep, and then I went to bed myself, and until I was woke up by the noise on deck, and by Sir Charles knocking at the door to ask if his daughter was there, I knew no more of what had happened than the babe unborn." She burst into tears again and continued to repeat, "I know I shall be thought an accomplice. I know it will be said that I was paid money to take no notice—which will be a most dreadful falsehood;" and the poor creature rocked herself in her wretchedness.

I addressed a few words of comfort to her and passed on. Her story was undoubtedly true, and it explained away a difficulty; for it had puzzled me to understand how Miss Primrose had contrived to dress herself and quit her cabin without disturbing her maid. As I looked at Mr. Cunningham's baggage, which stood near his chest of drawers in a corner of the cabin, I wondered if the man would ever turn up again to claim them, whether we should ever again hear of him and his sweetheart, or

supposing them to come off with their lives, what sort of adventures would befal them before they reached England. What, I thought to myself as I looked through the open port into the black profound of breathless sea and sky as they showed in that tube of window—what will be the girl's thoughts as she sits in the boat somewhere out yonder in the deep solitude of this immensity of water, and under that heaven of scintillant dusk? Is there any magic in the passion of love to reconcile her to such a situation? Will she not by this time be glad to exchange the bliss of sitting by her lover's side in an open boat in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean for the comfort of her berth, for the hospitable light and life of the saloon, for the safety of this stout tall ship, the *Light of Asia?*

I returned on deck, and as I stepped on to the quarter-deck on my road to the poop I was in time to hear the chief officer standing at the rail overhead call out: "A reward of ten guineas will be given to the first man, soldier or sailor, it matters not, who sights the boat."

There were many dusky figures flitting about on the poop. I looked around for the General, and presently spied his tall shape pacing, alone, a few feet of the deck near the wheel. I joined a group formed of Colonel Mowbray and other officers and some ladies, and stood with them, talking over the strange incidents of the night, the prospects of the recovery of the boat, the insane audacity of the elopement. One must have thought that the dawn never would come, so indescribably slow was the passage of those dark hours. I purposely raised my voice that Sir Charles might know I was on deck and question me if he chose; but he held aloof, he had nothing to say; once somebody joined him, but he speedily shook him off.

The calm was as preternatural for oppressive stillness, for the enormousness of the hush rising out of its heart and subduing every sense, till one felt the influence of it as a sort of command upon the spirits;—the calm, I say, was almost as beyond nature as the horrific snake-laden stagnation described in the *Ancient Mariner*. Shortly before daybreak I found the

dusky figure of the second mate standing near me, and asked him how he did.

"I'm all right again now, sir, thank you."

"Shall we recover the runaways, think you?"

"I believe not," he answered in a low voice.

"Even if the boat should be in sight when the sun rises, is the captain going to send in chase?"

"He'll not do it unless some wind comes to enable him to hold his boats in view, and there's no hint that I can find in the sky of any wind for the next twenty-four hours, if it comes *then*."

"The two sailors must have been handsomely bribed to fall in with so desperate a scheme?"

"Ay, sir, big promises and some ready money on top of them weren't wanting, I dare say. Unfortunately, Mr. Pellew, as he called himself, has got hold of two of the worst men in the ship; fellows, so the bo'sun was saying, whose characters would the least bear looking into. It is that which makes the situation of the lady bad, and her father's to be pitied if

we don't pick 'em up. 'Twill be a heart-breaking job for him, so stern as he is and so proud too, and not liked well enough to be condoled with, d'ye see, so that his heart'll have to burst by itself in its iron case if its splitting or holding together is going to depend upon kind words and sympathy."

As he spoke, a dim, most elusive sheen of green, like a delicate mist upon which the reflection of a coloured glass is cast, was visible upon the rim of the eastern sea. It was the first of the daybreak, and to the instant glimpse of it there was a rush aloft; a dance of all hands up the shrouds, with soldiers slowly and warily crawling up the rigging, holding on very tightly, and often pausing to look up. Every mast bore its burthen of starers like clusters of bees settled upon the yards, when with the velocity of the tropic daybreak the sun sprang off the sea-line and flashed up the whole scene of sea and sky into a day splendent and boundless. Perched on the main-royal yard at an elevation of I know not how many feet above the deck was the figure of the chief mate, with a telescope at his eye; and on high,

'AT DAYBREAK THERE WAS A RUSH ALOFT OF ALL HANDS."

on the fore-royal yard, with his head on a level with the truck, stood the figure of the second mate, also with a telescope at his eye; and with the slow deliberate motion of the merchant sailor, the two worthy fellows swept the ocean with their glasses. We down on the poop all stood staring up, breathless, agitated, hearkening for the first cry that should announce the visibility of a minute speck upon the horizon. But all remained silent aloft. The very ship seemed to participate in the emotion of the time, to hush the stir of her canvas, to arrest the swaying of her mast-heads.

"Main-royal yard there!" shouted the captain. "Do you see anything of the boat, Mr. Freeman?"

"Nothing, sir," came back the answer, clear but small as it fell from that spire-like altitude.

"She *must* be within range of the telescope," I heard the captain say, talking *at* Sir Charles, though addressing the passengers generally, "but the lenses aren't powerful enough to reveal her."

"Has she been picked up by some passing vessel, do you think?" somebody enquired.

"Nothing with sails *could* have passed her," answered the captain, "and steam we should have seen or heard. The lookout that's been kept has been bright enough."

The General approached the square little man whose insult of the night I could not forgive. I was startled by the haggardness and hollowness of his—that is to say, Sir Charles's—face; it was difficult to believe that passion and emotion could work so violent a change in a resolved and mature nature in so short a time. His complexion was of a greenish tinge; the pallor would have been ashen in a fair man, but it showed sickly, ghastly indeed, in its hue on his almost chocolate-coloured cheek. His black eyes were restless and full of the fire of temper; but there was a new expression of fierceness in his face; it almost amounted to ferocity as he looked down upon Stagg. This was a man to pity in the dark, when one could *imagine* him only, and invent whatever feelings and sensations one chose for him in his affliction; but in the day-

time sympathy was shot dead by his burning level glance. I confess as I looked at him when he approached Stagg that I ceased to feel sorry for him.

A number of the passengers were standing near; they could not miss what he said, nor did he address Stagg as though he were sensible of the presence of other listeners.

"The boat is not in sight then?"

"No, Sir Charles. But, as I have said, that'll be the fault of the telescope. She's bound to be this side of the horizon from half that way up, ay, from a quarter that way up," said the captain, indicating the mainmast with his elbow.

"But she is not in sight," repeated the General with vehemence, "no matter whether she ought or ought not to be so."

"No, she's not in sight."

"And what do you mean to do?"

"What *can* I do, sir?" exclaimed the captain, sending a gaze of despair, that was made comical by the twist of his nose and mouth, over the burnished blue sea in whose eastern quarter the sun's reflection flamed as though we were afloat on an ocean of quicksilver.

"When wind comes," said the General, pronouncing his words as though he found difficulty in preventing his teeth from meeting, "you will proceed on your voyage. The ship is not to be detained a minute on *my* account."

"I want my boat," said Stagg, with a countenance of gloomy astonishment, "and I want my two men."

"So far as my wishes are concerned," continued the General, "you will not waste an instant in search when wind comes. The voyage already threatens to be unusually long. Your boat is of small consequence compared to the loss of time you must incur in perhaps fruitlessly seeking her."

I glanced at the faces of the people who were listening. The general expression was one of disgust and dismay.

"But it's not a question only of the boat, Sir Charles," cried Captain Stagg; "there are four human beings adrift in her, and one—" the General saw what was coming and scowled him into silence.

"My wishes are that when the wind comes

you proceed without a moment's unnecessary delay on your voyage," he exclaimed, letting

"MY WISHES ARE THAT WHEN THE WIND COMES YOU PROCEED WITHOUT A MOMENT'S UNNECESSARY DELAY ON YOUR VOYAGE."

each word drop from his lips as though it were of lead; and then, without a look at us, with-

out a glance at the sea, with a face of wood, he marched to the companion and disappeared.

Colonel Mowbray, a mild-mannered gentlemanly little man, who had stood at my side surveying the General, whilst he talked, with looks of horror, turned to me and said: "He's not accountable. He must not be held to mean what he says. Captain Stagg," he exclaimed, advancing to the skipper, "you will not of course dream of relinquishing your resolution to search for the boat?"

"Only let there come wind!" cried Stagg. "Not that it wouldn't serve the four of them right to leave them to their fate. What! to steal my boat," he roared, clenching his fist, "and gag and frap my second mate as though he were the remains of a tawps'l in a gale of wind!"

Well, one saw clearly enough that, General or no General, the skipper meant to recover his boat if he could come at her; but for the rest of the day we could all of us talk of little more than Sir Charles's inhuman language, the horribly unnatural resolution he had formed, during those hours of darkness in which he

had stood watching the sea, to oblige (if he could) the captain to leave his daughter, not to mention the others, to the dreadful doom, as it seemed to us all, into which she had been courted by her lover; and a deal of talk was also expended in wondering what was going to happen should the boat be picked up and the lovers brought aboard again. But in truth there was nothing to be done; we could only go on surmising, with a vague sort of fancy, of any hour giving us a sight of the boat. For action was impossible; all that day and all the following night the ship lay lifeless; there was not a whisper of air in the wide and blazing circle round, and throughout the hours of darkness the hush, the death-like repose, was even supremer than on the previous night.

Sir Charles came and went as heretofore; he took his place at the table, ate with his customary appetite, and was noticeable for no other change whatever that I could witness in him—beyond the sickly hue and sudden ageing of his face—than an increase in his reserve. He seldom spoke, and when on deck he walked alone; but we all of us noticed that if he

glanced seawards the act appeared involuntary. There was no suggestion of searching in his gaze, no hint that his mind was out upon that broad breast of waters.

The lovers had eloped on a Wednesday night, and it was not until the following Friday afternoon at about three o'clock that the water in the south-west was darkened by the brushing of a merry breeze of wind, which, flashing into the full breasts of the ship's canvas, heeled her like a schooner in a yacht-match, and once more her metalled forefoot drove shearing in snow through the wrinkled and frothing leagues of brine. Calculations as to the boat's whereabouts, supposing her to be still afloat, had been carefully entered into by Stagg and his mates. It was known that the lovers and the two men had gone away without providing themselves with mast or sail; which simply signified that they counted wholly upon the luck of being picked up by a passing ship. The captain therefore allowed the boat a progress of about two miles in the hour from the moment of her starting; and the space of ocean to be swept comprised an area

whose semi-diameter, starting at the point where the ship had lain becalmed, terminated a league or two beyond the distance it was assumed the boat had attained. Men whose eyes were sharp were stationed at the mastheads, and the ship rushed along on a wild wide hunt. The interest was so profound, the excitement so great, the desire to rescue Miss Primrose at least from the horribly perilous situation her love had hurried her into was so consuming, that the passengers could scarcely be tempted from the deck, even by the ringing of the dinner-bell, whilst a gleam of daylight lived in the west. Until the night came down dark we were overhanging the rail intently staring, uttering ejaculations as one or another of us imagined we saw something black in the distance, some of the younger officers creeping up the mizzen rigging, whilst Burton managed to get as high as the cross-trees, where he stood surveying the sea through an eyeglass. The ladies were incessantly asking if there was anything in sight, and I grew weary at last of poising a telescope for them to look through, so satisfied were they that they had keener eyes

than any of us men, and that they would be the first to see the boat if they knew how to look through a telescope without help.

But we stared in vain. Nothing hove into view this side of sunset. The captain shortened sail after dark and ordered lanterns to be shown and rockets to be fired, not unwisely suspecting that if the four were still afloat they would by this time have had enough of their open boat and endeavour to make for the ship should she drive with her lamps and her fireworks into the sphere of their horizon. But though we jogged slowly through the night, with penetrating eyes searching the dusk, and lanterns bravely burning along the rail, nothing showed, and when the grey dawn broke with a dirty scud, like smoke, blowing up off the rim of the south-west horizon, and a long tumble of frothing sea crossing a strong northerly swell that had risen suddenly in the night, the ocean brimmed bare to the slope of the sky.

Yet for three successive days did Stagg persevere. Over and over again the braces were manned, the course shifted, and the ship's keel

driven along a new line of quest. Sir Charles's demeanour had hardened into utter impenetrability. One explored his countenance in vain for the vaguest hint of what was passing in his mind. He asked no questions—took visibly no interest whatever in the manœuvring of the ship, came and went, ate and drank, and seemed to find a gloomy and perhaps savage satisfaction in exhibiting himself as a triumph of insensibility.

I happened to be in the saloon on the last day of the hunt. The General was seated alone on a sofa near his cabin with spectacles on nose, reading a book. There was a strong sailing wind blowing—a fair wind for our voyage, but foul for the line of hunt we were just then steering along, and the vessel was breaking the seas angrily as she leaned from the wind with her yards almost fore and aft. The captain came below, and seeing Sir Charles, stood looking at him with an air of irresolution for a moment or two; then stepping up to him exclaimed:

"General, I fear we must give up the search."

Sir Charles seemed not to hear. Indeed, he did not raise his eyes, as though unconscious of the presence of the man who stood in front of him. Stagg was nettled.

"The boat's not to be found, Sir Charles," he exclaimed in a harsh voice, "and as we've sighted nothing that could have fallen in with her, and as there's been likewise some stiff seas running, it looks uncommonly like as though she's foundered."

"What is it you want to tell me?" said Sir Charles, frowning as he gazed at the skipper over the tops of his spectacles.

"Why, that we must give up seeking and proceed on our voyage."

"I told you to do so at the first opportunity the wind offered," thundered the General.

The skipper with a single pause of disgust and astonishment—and salt-hardened as the fellow's soul was, I believe he was as much shocked as I and two or three others who at the other end of the saloon had listened to this brief conversation—the little skipper, I say, rounded upon his heels and ran on deck. His

voice swept through the hum of the wind in a roar that was swiftly re-echoed, and in a few minutes the decks were filled with sailors busy in bracing the yards for the ship to come to her course for the voyage to India.

And here terminated the extraordinary incident I have endeavoured to relate, so far as my association with it goes. Upon the subsequent behaviour of the General, upon Captain Stagg's very tardy apology to me, upon what was said, and no doubt thought, by the passengers, I might enlarge. But let me hasten rather to the issue of this curious ocean experience of us passengers aboard the *Light of Asia.*

I had been in India two years when a brother officer, who had not long joined, asked me if I had come from England in the same ship that had brought out Sir Charles Primrose.

I answered yes.

"Then," cried he, "you were in the ship when his daughter eloped with a young fellow named Cunningham in an open boat?"

"All this," said I, "is no news to me."

"I had heard," said he, "that you were in

the *Light of Asia.* Did you ever hear the sequel of the elopement?"

"I should think," said I, "that the story of that sequel must be sought for at the bottom of the sea."

"Oh dear no," he exclaimed, "wait a minute: I have the full particulars of it in my room." He went away and returned after a little with a cutting from an Indian newspaper—the *Times of India,* I believe it was. It is long ago since I read it, and my memory is not what it was; but to the best of my recollection it was to this effect:

"At such and such a date," making the period some seven or eight months from the day of the elopement, "a large American ship, named the *Constance Warwick,* arrived at the Port of New York, and her master, a person named Ephraim Kerr, related the following, probably in the form of a deposition, but such as it was it speedily found its way into the newspapers. Captain Kerr, during the homeward voyage from Madagascar, when something to the north of the Cape of Good Hope on the Atlantic side, fell in with a large

"THE SCHOONER HAD FALLEN IN WITH AN OPEN BOAT CONTAINING FOUR PERSONS, ONE OF WHOM WAS A LADY."

three-masted schooner with colours flying, 'To Speak.' The topsail was laid to the mast and the schooner ranged alongside within hailing distance. Her captain, standing in the mizzen rigging, informed Captain Kerr that when in latitude 2° N. he had fallen in with an open boat containing four persons, one of whom was a lady. The schooner was bound to a Western Australian port; the people she had rescued wanted to return to England; would the *Constance Warwick* receive them? Captain Kerr replied that his ship was bound to New York, and that if the four persons were willing to be carried to that city, he would be glad to take them on board. On this a boat containing a lady and gentleman and two sailors, rowed by a couple of the schooner's men and steered by the master of the schooner, put off and came alongside the *Constance Warwick*."

Needless to say that the lady and gentleman were Mr. Cunningham and Miss Primrose, and the others the two seamen who had formed part of the crew of the *Light of Asia*.

"The master of the schooner took Captain Kerr aside and told him that the lady and gen-

tleman and sailors had explained their situation thus: That they belonged to an East Indiaman bound to Calcutta, that having been tempted by the sight of a wreck to explore her, they, on a calm still day, with the permission of the captain of the Indiaman, who considered two seamen crew enough for the boat, started for the wreck; but a change of weather happening very suddenly, they lost the ship. This was their story. The master of the schooner told Captain Kerr that he didn't believe it. First, the boat was found fairly victualled, and this certainly did not suggest that the party had started on a holiday jaunt for an hour or two. Next, it was not to be supposed that the boat would have been despatched without an officer in charge of her. However, be the truth what it might, they had stuck to this story, and as it was no business of the master of the schooner, he had made, outside a few questions, no very particular enquiries.

"The *Constance Warwick* proceeded on her voyage to New York, and during the run one of the sailors, whilst muddled with rum, gave the whole story to a number of the American

Jacks as they were seated, during their watch below, in the forecastle. This was repeated to the mate; the mate communicated it to Captain Kerr, who, on asking Mr. Cunningham if the narrative were true, was assured that it was absolutely so."

Thus it was that the story found its way into print. It was republished in the English newspapers and copied by the Indian journals. But locomotion, whether by sea or land, was, as we all know, sluggish in those days; and hence the length of time that elapsed before I, who was then in India, got the news of the sequel of the incident as related by the Captain of the *Constance Warwick* at New York.

When many years after I returned to England I made inquiries about Mr. and Mrs. Cunningham, but never could get to hear more than that after the death of old Mrs. Cunningham, her son had let or sold the property he inherited, and settled with his wife somewhere in the South of France.

THE END.

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